

The Sanskrit Epics

By
John Brockington

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THE SANSKRIT EPICS

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PREFACE

The centrality of the two great Sanskrit epics, the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*, to the whole of Indian culture has long been recognised, although its extent has perhaps not always been appreciated. The subject matter of this volume is correspondingly extensive and the task of making a suitable selection from all that has been said about them has not been an easy one. My aim has been to present an overview of both epics, within which the history of previous scholarship and the current state of research are given particular prominence, and thereby to build up a coherent view of the nature and significance of the epics, both in themselves and in relation to the rest of Indian culture. For each epic the linguistic and related evidence is presented first, next the material culture and the social, economic and political aspects are surveyed, and then the religious aspects are examined. Although the primary concentration is on the epics themselves, including the *Harivamśa*, the final chapter seeks to present the wider picture and in conclusion even to look into the future of epic studies.

I am grateful to Johannes Bronkhorst for first suggesting, in the middle of 1993, that I should undertake this volume for the *Handbuch der Orientalistik*. I also acknowledge with gratitude the receipt from the Humanities Research Board of the British Academy of an award to fund a term of research leave and the release of funds from within the University of Edinburgh which permitted me to take a further two terms of leave, without which the completion of this volume within a reasonable timescale would have been impossible.

I am greatly indebted to many individuals who have helped me in one way or another in its writing. Those who have assisted by the provision of information or of offprints—often before this particular venture was even thought of—are too numerous to name here (although most are acknowledged at appropriate points in the text). However, I should like to record my particular gratitude to Horst Brinkhaus, Freda Matchett and Peter Schreiner for reading various parts of the book and making helpful suggestions for its improvement; Mary Brockington has read and commented on the entire

typescript and has assisted in its production in many ways and in particular by the compilation of the bibliography and the indices, for all of which I am indebted to her more than I can say.

John Brockington
July 1997

GENERAL ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviations for journals will be found preceding the Bibliography

Ait. Br.	<i>Aitareya Brāhmaṇa</i>
App.	Appendix (in text references App. denotes Appendix I of the Critical Editions)
BhG.	<i>Bhagavadgītā</i>
CE	Critical Edition
Ch. Up.	<i>Chāndogya Upaniṣad</i>
Hv.	<i>Harivāṇśa</i>
KA	<i>Kauṭilya Arthaśāstra</i>
[l.v.]	verse in longer (non-śloka) metre
Manu	<i>Mānavadharmaśāstra/Manusmṛti</i>
Mbh.	<i>Mahābhārata</i>
PPL	<i>Purāṇa Pañcalakṣaṇa</i> (Kirfel 1927)
RV	<i>Rgveda</i>
Rām.	<i>Rāmāyaṇa</i>
Śat. Br.	<i>Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa</i>

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background

The study of the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa* goes back in the West to the early years of Indology but in India itself reaches back at least to the time of the earliest commentaries—in the middle of the 13th century for the *Rāmāyaṇa* and probably earlier for the *Mahābhārata*. Throughout the history of Indology, Western scholars have generally called them the two Sanskrit epics, as in the title of this volume, a practice which has brought together under one label two works which the Indian tradition designates by different terms, neither of which can really be translated as epic; for the *Mahābhārata* it uses most often the term *itihāsa*, which might broadly be translated as ‘chronicle’, while the *Rāmāyaṇa* is designated the *ādikāvya*, ‘the first poetic work’. Moreover, the *itihāsa* or *itihāsapurāṇa* is always attributed to a sage who ‘speaks’ rather than ‘sings’ his composition, whereas the *Rāmāyaṇa* is regularly referred to as being sung. Equally, there is the point of the rather different attitudes to them, which have meant that a text of the *Rāmāyaṇa* (often admittedly a vernacular version rather than Vālmīki’s) is found in many homes, whereas the *Mahābhārata* is widely regarded as an inauspicious text and (with important exceptions such as the *Bhagavadgītā*) is often not read or recited in their homes by pious Hindus. It is, therefore, worth asking from the start whether designation of the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa* as ‘epics’ affects our understanding of them, generating expectations derived from ideas about the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. As well as considering the common characteristics implied by the term (which are undoubtedly present), it is also pertinent to ask how far the Sanskrit epics do actually constitute a pair of closely inter-related compositions and how far they share a common milieu, as the use of the term implies.¹ While their plots are broadly similar, the way in which they treat the battle that forms

¹ For a sensitive exploration of some of the differences in approach between the two epics, see Shulman 1991.

the climax of each work is very different—the *Mahābhārata* views it with doubt, hesitation and ambiguity but the *Rāmāyaṇa* has no doubts at all about its basic morality—and this constitutes a major difference in their overall ethos.

The *Mahābhārata* is generally accepted as the longest poem in the world and it boasts that all knowledge is contained within its encyclopaedic bulk of nearly 75,000 verses (traditionally indeed 100,000 verses in total) in the well known verse stating that in relation to the four aims of man (*dharma, artha, kāma, mokṣa*) ‘whatever is here may be found elsewhere, but what is absent from here does not exist anywhere’ (1.56.33cd, repeated at 18.5.38cd, following the same first line). The 18 *parvans* into which it is usually divided vary greatly in length, from the twelfth, the *Sāntiparvan*, with well over 12,000 verses, down to the seventeenth, the *Mahāprasthānikaparvan*, with only just over a hundred; there is also an alternative and probably older count into 100 *parvans* (which also have specific names like the better known 18 and include the *Hariwamśa* in the total), while most southern manuscripts—but not the printed editions—preserve a division into 24 *parvans*. The *Rāmāyaṇa*, with a little under 20,000 verses in its 7 *kāṇḍas*, is on nothing like the same scale but is still a substantial work.

The framework stories of both the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata* present them as oral compositions in a way which suggests the importance of the roles not only of the bard or reciter but also of the audience whose presence is integral to this introductory frame. On the other hand, over most of their history they have been transmitted by brāhmans in written form (even if the manuscript testimony is on the whole fairly recent) and have continued to develop throughout. The *Rāmāyaṇa* opens with Vālmīki asking Nārada about the ideal man: hearing from him in brief about Rāma, he thereupon composes the entire narrative and teaches it to Rāma’s twin sons living in his hermitage, who are thus its first reciters (Rām. 1.1–4, cf. 7.84–85). The *Mahābhārata* opens with the words of the *sūta*, the bard, to the brāhmans assembled in the Naimiṣa forest for Śaunaka’s *sattra*, declaring that he has come from the great sacrifice of Janamejaya—another *sattra*—aimed at destroying all the world’s snakes, where Vaiśampāyana recounted the tales that he had heard from Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana Vyāsa and that constitute the *Mahābhārata* (Mbh. 1.1.1–10). Here we have the epic presented as if being narrated then and there, with reciters and audience actually within the text. It is therefore somewhat ironic that the story about Vyāsa dictating the text to Gaṇeśa as his amanuensis (and throwing in occasional knotty or obscure verses to slow

him down) has become so well known—and was, for example, featured prominently in Peter Brook's stage and television version of the *Mahābhārata*. This has in fact no basis whatsoever in the text, from which indeed Gaṇeśa is absent in any capacity,² although it does occur as an inserted passage added in some manuscripts to Appendix I.1, itself an insertion into the first chapter of the *Ādiparvan*. The many *phalaśrutis* found in manuscripts do, of course, frequently proclaim the merits of reading the text and one of these has been included in the closing verses of the epic (Mbh. 18.5.51).³

It is clear that the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa* represent the culmination of a lengthy tradition of oral poetry, transmitted through recitation by the *sūtas* or bards. The oral origins of the Sanskrit epics have, indeed, long been recognised. A century ago, in an exercise in text reconstruction of a *Rāmāyaṇa* passage, Hermann Jacobi identified the narration of certain episodes twice in slightly different forms as a relic of the oral tradition;⁴ by contrast, over seventy years ago, the start of publication of the Northwestern recension of the *Rāmāyaṇa* prompted E. Washburn Hopkins to question whether an original *Rāmāyaṇa* had ever existed, drawing the conclusion from the textual variations between the recensions that no plausible original could be reconstructed and that in practice right from the first repetition of the text by a bard no original *Rāmāyaṇa* existed.⁵ Another aspect of the early debate about the nature of the Sanskrit epics that has now been superseded was the view that because of their popular nature they must have been composed in the popular language—in one of the Prakrits—and only later transposed into Sanskrit;⁶ though long

² As Moriz Winternitz noted a century ago (1898b and 1898c). From the absence of the story of Gaṇeśa acting as Vyāsa's scribe in Kṣemendra's *Bhāratamāṭyārī* he argued that it was still not part of the *Mahābhārata* in his time, even though it was known to Rājaśekhara who included it in his *Bālabhārata* around 900 A.D.

³ Indeed, K. M. Ganguli's translation (*Mahābhārata* 1883–96; vol. 19) concludes the *Swargorohanaparvan* with a whole section which ends with prescriptions for the worship of a copy of the text, none of which is found even in * passages or App. I. All references to the epics are to their Critical Editions (*Mahābhārata* 1933–66, *Harwanīśa* 1969–71, *Rāmāyaṇa* 1960–75). References in numerals only denote the text which is the main focus of that chapter, where one only is being discussed; otherwise, Mbh., Hv. or Rām. is prefixed as appropriate. The term ‘* passages’ is used generically to designate all material excluded from the text of the Critical Editions in either the critical apparatus or Appendix I (unless context clearly indicates a more limited usage).

⁴ Jacobi 1897; cf. also Jacobi 1893 and 1903a.

⁵ Hopkins 1926. The fifth chapter of his *Great Epic of India* (1901) implies much the same.

⁶ Although Jacobi ruled out the possibility (1893: 112–119), G. A. Grierson in a review article on the book (1894) declared himself favourably inclined towards a Prakrit original of the epics, prompting a rejoinder from Jacobi (1894). Subsequently,

abandoned, such views serve as a reminder that the Sanskrit epics are in an unusual linguistic position, which may well have influenced the process of transmission in ways that differ from most comparable literature in other parts of the world.

The relationship of the epics to Vedic literature

The first traces of epic poetry are perhaps to be found in Vedic literature, since the *Rgveda* contains some narrative or dialogue hymns (*samvāda*), such as 4.18 (Indra and Aditi), 10.10 (Yama and Yamī), 10.85 (*Sūryasūkta*) and 10.95 (the most famous, the dialogue of Purūravas and Urvaśī), which in effect contain narrative fragments in verse which give such compositions the character of ancient ‘ballads’. Hermann Oldenberg termed them *ākhyāna* hymns and identified in them the relics of ancient epic tales, whose style alternates prose and verse, the former used for the narrative and the latter for the dialogue, according to a structural scheme of which there is ample evidence not only in Sanskrit literature but also more widely.⁷ Subsequently Johannes Hertel and then Moriz Winternitz saw in the Vedic *samvādas* or *ākhyānas* the origin of both the epic and the drama.⁸

Later we find in the Brāhmaṇas a number of short legends, mostly in prose but sometimes partly in verse. From these examples, it seems that such poems were recited as part of the religious ceremonies at major sacrifices and at domestic festivals—in the year-long preliminaries to the horse sacrifice, for instance, legends of gods and heroes were recited daily. There were not only single ballads but also cycles of ballads. R. C. Hazra, from an analysis of the topics of the *pāriplava ākhyānas* narrated in a ten day cycle by the *hotṛ* during the *aśvamedha*, seeks to show that they must be regarded as the origin of the *purāṇa-pañcalakṣaṇa* and that the *Mahābhārata* is based on the topic of the eighth day, which relates to the king of the fishermen (drawing support from the role of Satyavatī, daughter of the king of the Dāśas, who were fishermen) and for which the text is named as *itihāsa*.⁹ J. Vekerdi,

T. W. Rhys Davids (1903) suggested that the ‘metrical prose’ of the *Mahābhārata* was ‘a result of the recasting into Sanskrit of a narrative once told in the living speech’.

⁷ Oldenberg 1883 and 1885; cf. also L. Alsdorf 1964. It may be noted that the *Sibicaria* cited by Oldenberg has been relegated to 3 App. 21.

⁸ Hertel 1904; Winternitz 1908–22, vol. 1.

⁹ Hazra 1955.

on the other hand, examines the genealogy of Bharata in the Brāhmaṇas and the *Mahābhārata* and concludes that ‘the Mahābhārata does not seem to reflect any historical event’ but rather oral epic tradition has degraded reminiscences of an actual battle into mere poetic topics.¹⁰

In later Vedic texts *itihāsa* and *purāṇa* are frequently mentioned and even referred to as the ‘fifth Veda’, while their popular nature is seen in their connection with the *Atharvaveda*. The *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, in the dialogue between Nārada and Sanatkumāra, speaks of a fifth Veda composed of tales and ancient stories (*itihāsapurāṇa*, Ch. Up. 7.1.2 and 7.7.1), just as later the *Mahābhārata* is called the fifth Veda, a designation which recognises its character as a collection of ancient tales, proclaims their priestly nature and claims a measure of authority for it.¹¹ Within the *Mahābhārata* itself, although the term *itihāsa* is by no means uncommon (occurring, for example, at 1.2.237a, 54.23d), the term *ākhyāna* is more often employed (for example, 1.1.16a, 2.239b, 240a, 241b) and even *upākhyāna* is used (1.2.236a).

Along with *itihāsa* and *purāṇa* are mentioned *gāthā nārāśamṣī*, ‘songs in praise of men’, among the texts which are pleasing to the gods. On the one hand, these are clearly linked to parts of the *Rgveda* and *Atharvaveda* but, on the other hand, they appear to be the direct precursors of the epics, since their contents are the glorious deeds of warriors and princes. Probably these developed into longer epic poems and then whole cycles of poems, of which there may be some evidence in the apocryphal *Suparnākhyāna*, which recounts the legend of Kadru and Vinatā and the history of the enmity between Garuḍa and the snakes and which is incorporated into the first book of the *Mahābhārata*. In the case of the *Mahābhārata*, a fluid mass of tales must have steadily crystallised into the story of a fratricidal struggle of limited political importance, but of great significance for the prestige of the protagonists—that is, the war of the Bhāratas—which is perhaps distantly prefigured in the war of the ten kings (RV 7.33.3,5 and 83.8), an episode identifiable with the Kurukṣetra conflict recorded in the *Sāṅkhāyanasūtra* (15.16) and quoted as the war between the Kurus and Pāṇḍavas in Patañjali.

¹⁰ Vekerdi 1974.

¹¹ Such an attitude makes sense of the verse in the *Mahābhārata* according to which a brāhmaṇa who knows the four Vedas with their limbs and Upaniṣads, but does not know this story, cannot be learned (Mbh. 1.2.235). On the other hand, it may well be that the emphasis on the epic as the fifth Veda and comparisons with them in reality testifies to a break between the Vedas and the *Mahābhārata*.

While it is reasonable to accept the existence of an *itihāsa-purāṇa* tradition already at the time of the compilation of the *Rgveda*, the few allusions there and the more concrete evidence of the Brāhmaṇas, the *Bṛhaddevatā*, and even more of the epics and Purāṇas, by no means establish a chain of dependence or development from these texts right back to the *Rgveda* but only some similarities.¹² It is in fact likely that both types of text have drawn on a common source, represented by an oral *itihāsa-purāṇa* tradition, which was already alive at the time of composition of the Vedas, and which was formed from local themes, myths, heroic legends, the beginnings of pseudo-historical and partisan chronicles of tribal origin, and cults of sacred places. However, it is worth noting that two *sūtra* texts refer to the *Bhārata* or *Mahābhārata* (*Āśvalāyanagrhyasūtra* 3.4.4 and *Śāṅkhāyanaśrautasūtra* 15.16).

To look at the issue also from a different angle, we may note the apparent occurrence of some epic characters in Vedic literature, although the names Pāṇḍu and Pāṇḍava, so central to the *Mahābhārata* narrative, are not mentioned at all. In particular, Janamejaya, whose great snake sacrifice forms part of the opening frame of the *Mahābhārata*, is known as a historical individual in the late Vedic literature and is said to have performed a horse sacrifice (*Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 13.5.4.1, cf. *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* 7.34 etc.); in a very late part of the *Atharvaveda* (20.127.7–10), his father Parikṣit is known and celebrated as a living person, whereas in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (16.9.7) his descendants, the Pārikṣitas, are a vanished dynasty. There is also a reference in the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* (8.14) to Uttara Kurus as living beyond the Himavat. With the *Rāmāyaṇa* the situation is somewhat different, for the name Sītā is well attested as that of a minor Vedic goddess, the giver of prosperity (RV 4.57.6–7), who is later the wife of Indra (*Pāraskaragrhyasūtra* 9.17.9/2.17.1–19) or else assimilated to Śrī and described as rich in lotuses, dark and with a golden garland (*Kauśikasūtra* 13.106.6–11).¹³ On the other hand, there is scant trace of any male figures apart from the dynastic name, Ikṣvāku (found, for example, at RV 10.60.4 and AV 19.39.9); mention of Raghu at RV 5.45.6 and Māndhāṭ at RV 10.146.1–6 have effectively nothing to do with the *Rāmāyaṇa* narrative and occasional occurrences of the

¹² V. V. Dixit (1950) has shown how limited are the relationships between the Brāhmaṇas and the Epic.

¹³ This goddess Sītā also appears at *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa* 2.3.4.1 and 2.3.10.1 and *Gobhilagrhyasūtra* 4.4.29.

name Rāma (RV 10.93.14, Śat. Br. 4.6.1.7, Ait. Br. 8.34) do not denote its hero.

The designation of the *Mahābhārata* as the ‘fifth Veda’ is not only a claim to continuity with the past but more importantly a claim to the authoritativeness of the Vedas, an authority which in theory also meant comprehensiveness (another aspect to the claim that everything is contained within it).¹⁴ This was reinforced by claiming that it had been promulgated by Vyāsa, the *r̄si* who was traditionally the compiler of the Vedas, even if the trend then to designate him as Kṛṣṇa Dvaipā-yana Vyāsa had the effect of reversing the process by tending to make him again an individual. James Fitzgerald, however, stresses the break between the Vedas and the *Mahābhārata* which is implicit in the very use of the term ‘fifth Veda’; seeing it as having an ideological continuity centred on the *Bhagavadgītā*, he suggests that its main theme (which he identifies as the need to replace the older agonistic *kṣatriya* order with a single virtuous king) is related to political realities following the rise of the Mauryas.¹⁵ Another side of this claim to authoritative-ness is the way in which the ultimate impetus to the production of both epics is traced back by their latest redactors to Brahmā. The *Mahābhārata* additionally includes in the opening chapter the statement that the sages in the Naimiṣa forest are eager to hear this ‘compilation’, *samhitā*, that has joined the four Vedas (1.1.19), deliberately using the term that commonly designates the Vedic hymns, at the same time as emphasising that it is suitable for an audience of religiously active brāhmaṇas. In the *Rāmāyaṇa* Vālmīki is granted a vision of Brahmā who commissions him to compose in full the story of Rāma about which he has just heard in brief from Nārada (1.2.22–37).

Finally, from this angle, there is the presence of references to or echoes of Vedic literature in the epics, first thoroughly surveyed for the *Mahābhārata* by Hopkins, with some updating on the *R̄gveda* citations by V. M. Apte.¹⁶ References to the Vedas in general terms are found not uncommonly in the *Mahābhārata* and are spread relatively evenly.¹⁷ Anything more explicit, even the listing of the three or four

¹⁴ This claim to be the fifth Veda is made most explicitly in the line *vedān adhāpayām āsa mahābhāratapāñcamān*, Mbh. 1.57.74ab and 12.327.18ab, but is implicit in *kārṣṇam vedam imam̄ vidvān̄ śrāvayitvārtham̄ aśnute*, Mbh. 1.1.205ab, 56.17cd and 18.57*.

¹⁵ Fitzgerald 1983 and 1985.

¹⁶ Hopkins 1901a: chapter 1, pp. 1–47; Apte 1941.

¹⁷ Even so, a formulaic *pāda* combining or contrasting the term with the ‘science of archery’, *dhanurveda*, shows a mainly late distribution; *dhanurvede ca vede ca* found at

Vedas or mention of Vedas along with Vedāngas, tends to be concentrated in the more didactic or otherwise later parts of the text. Thus, for example, in the much expanded *Āranyakaparvan*, among the 108 names of Sūrya are *vedakartā vedāṅgo vedavāhanah* at 3.3.21cd; the sound of the *Yajur*, *Rg* and *Sāma* Vedas along with prose—in the context probably the Brāhmaṇas are meant—rises from hermitages at 3.27.3ab; the four Vedas with the Aṅgas and Upāṅgas are put on a par with truth at 3.61.16ab; a sage recites the Vedas with the Aṅgas and the Upaniṣad(s) at 3.97.23c; the *Sāma*, *Yajur* and *Rg* Vedas were absent in the Kṛtayuga but in the Dvāparayuga there are four Vedas and men know four, three, two, one or none (3.148.13a and 26–27, in the *Tīrthayātrāparvan*); Nārāyaṇa declares to Mārkandeya that he produced the *Rgveda*, *Sāmaveda*, *Yajurveda* and the *Atharvans* at 3.187.14ab. In the opening chapter of the *Ādiparvan* Vyāsa arranged the eternal Veda (1.1.52); in Nārada’s description of the celestial halls the *Rgveda*, *Sāmaveda*, *Yajurveda*, *Atharvaveda*, as well as Upavedas and Vedāngas are there (2.11.23–24); within the *Sanatsujātiya* Brahman is not in the *Rg*, *Yajur*, *Atharva* or *Sāma* Vedas (5.44.21ab). Alongside such listings of four Vedas, the following *pāda* giving just the three Vedas may be noted: *rco yajumṣi sāmāni* at 9.35.33a (in the less well known *Tīrthayātrāparvan* narrating Balarāma’s pilgrimage, which also refers to the *muni* Sārasvata’s recitation of the Vedas at 9.50.2–3) and 12.243.2c (also at 1 App. 1.23 pr., and in different wording at 6.31.17d and 12.230.8b). However, to set against this, there are a number of separate references to the *Atharvaveda*, of which perhaps the most notable is that the group of spells given to Kuntī by which she can bring the gods to her is revealed in the *Atharvaśiras* (3.289.20cd); others occur at 1.64.33, 5.18.7–8 (*Atharvāṅgirasa*), 8.49.69ab (*arthāṅgirasi hy eṣā śrutiñam uttamā śrutiḥ*), 13.10.34a (*atharvaveda vede ca*, making a distinction between it and the rest) and 13.95.75c = 96.44c (with mention in the first half of the verse of Adhvaryu and Chandoga).¹⁸ Interestingly the phrase

Mbh. 1.61.65a, 921* 7 pr., 1843* 1 pr., 12.50.23c, 13.2.8c, 31.9c, 107.138a (also v.l. at 1.102.17a) and Rām. 2 App. 2.114 pr., App. 4.54 pr. and 5.33.14c. The *dhanurveda* occurs also at Mbh. 1.45.11c, 61.65a, 102.17a, 120.3d, 5a, 15d, 17d, 20a, 21b, 121.15d, 22d, 122.24d, 25d, 123.9b, 24d, 179.4d, 181.16a, 19c, 213.65b, 2.4.28c, 5.110c, 3.37.40c, 38.4c, 115.30a, 126.30a, 5.155.3c, 193.57b, 6.57.13a (‘*vid*’), 70.33b, 7.22.32a, 73.45b, 87.20c, 43b, 105.7d, 8.24.157b, 50.95c, 97a, 52.30a, 166.4b, 12b, 169.1c, 9.43.22a, 12.50.23c, 203.19b (where it is ascribed to Bharadvāja, just as the *gāndhārva veda* is ascribed to Nārada, cf. 3.89.13–14), 13.2.8c, 31.9c, 56.7c, 107.138a, 135.105a, and Rām. 1.1.13d, 54.16b, 511* 3, 513* 3 and 2.1.23c.

¹⁸ To these may be added the narrative by Mārkandeya about the origin of the fires, including the role of Aṅgiras as an Atharvan, a fire priest (3.212).

yāmyāni sāmāni at 2.71.7a means ‘chants of death’ and so has no connection with the *Sāmaveda*, any more than do *gītānām̄ talatālānām̄ yathā sāmnām̄ ca nisvanah* at 3.155.84ab and the songs sung by Gandharvas to an extremely sweet melody (*tatra sma gāthā gāyanti sāmnā paramavalgunā | gandharvāḥ tumburuśreṣṭhāḥ kuśalāḥ gītasāmasu*, 3.44.28); on the other hand, in the *Bhagavadgītā* Kṛṣṇa declares that he is the *Sāmaveda* of the Vedas (6.32.22ab), the *pitṛmedha* is celebrated for the dead warriors with *samans* (11.26.39c, cf. *sāmnām̄ rcām̄ ca nādena* at 40a) and at 13.14.159ab the *Sāmaveda* is supreme among the Vedas, just as the *Śatarudrīya* is among *Yajus* hymns.¹⁹

The Veda and Vedāngas are mentioned at 1.94.32, 144.5ab, 206.2a and 12.311.23b, the Veda and six *angas* at 1.98.9cd and 1.159.17a (also 2 App. 2.3), the Veda(s) in general at 3.261.4c, 7.22.32b (*brāhma vede* contrasted with *dhanurveda*), 12.19.17a, 238.13a (*rahasyam̄ sarva-vedānām̄*), 311.22–23, 337.40 and 13.96.45a, and the four Vedas at 9.5.14c, 43.21c (*vedaś ca caturmūrtih*) and 12.326.100b (also 7.1457* 3/ App. 25.8–9). Teaching, reciting or chanting of the Vedas are mentioned for example at 5.106.10a (Viṣṇu first sang the Vedas, cf. Nārāyaṇa creating the Vedas at 12.326.94 and 327.59, and Brahmā proclaiming them at 5.17.9ab and 12.314.47b), 12.314.23cd (Vyāsa to his pupils) and 12.321.24ab (Nārada affirms to Nārāyaṇa: *vedesu sapurāṇesu sāṅgopāṅgeṣu gīyase*; the first half also at 12.328.6c, followed in 8–9 by the declaration that the deity is proclaimed in the four, named, Vedas, and in Purāṇa, Upaniṣad, Jyotiṣa, Sāṃkhya, Yogaśāstra and Āyurveda); the authoritativeness of the Vedas, *vedaprāmāṇya*, is asserted at 12.261.36a. Individual hymns are occasionally named, for example, the *Śatarudrīya* (at 7.57.71b, 173.79b, 12 App. 28.291, 13.14.147f, 159b, 146.23b), the *Sāvitrī* (at 2.11.25a, 3.177.29c, 5.106.10 and 7.1457* 2) and the *Gāyatrī* (at 7 App. 25.10), just as *omkāra* is (at 5.106.14a, 6.31.17c, 7.1457* 2, App. 25.11 and 12.325.4⁸³—the last as a name of Nārāyaṇa). Incidentally, as some of the references earlier in this paragraph indicate, the *Mahābhārata* appears to know a class of literature called Purāṇa, either singular or plural (1.102.18, 12.43.6, 12.86.8, 12.201.5, 12.283.7, 12.321.24, 12.328.6, 13.16.18), but it is not possible to know just what is meant by the term, although it is at least possible that it refers to a precursor or precursors of the extant Purāṇas. Certainly, there is no unequivocal reference in the text to any of the extant Purāṇas. When Mārkaṇḍeya concludes his

¹⁹ Such references are commoner in the latest parts of the epic (for example, *atra sāma sma gāyanti sāmagāḥ puṇyanisvanāḥ* Mbh. 3 App. 16.11).

narrative of the fish that saved Manu by saying that it is the ancient story called that of the fish (*ity etan mātsyakam nāma purāṇam parikīrtitam*, 3.185.53ab), the natural way to understand it is as referring to the narrative just given. Even Mārkanḍeya's reference to some of his instruction about the Yugas as remembered from the ancient knowledge uttered by Vāyu and praised by sages (*vāyuproktam anusmrtya purāṇam ṛṣisamstutam*, 3.189.14ef) seems a general rather than a specific reference and the teaching given does not correspond to anything in the present *Vāyu Purāṇa*. The only argument in favour of seeing these two as more specific is indeed the relative lateness of the passage in which they occur.²⁰

The most specific information about Vedic literature and ritual is found in the *Śānti* and *Anuśāsana parvans*; thus, for example, the three Vedas and the six Vedāngas are individually named at 12.194.8, the Vedāngas are ascribed to Bṛhaspati at 12.203.18b, the *Rgveda* is declared to have a thousand verses at 12.238.14c, the *Rgveda* has 21 branches, the *Sāmaveda* 100, and the *Yajurveda* 101 (56+8+37) at 12.330.32–33, with the *Atharvaveda* added in verse 34, and the *Sāmaveda* and the *Rgveda* are linked with different Yugas at 12.336.10+20. Still more specifically, the *Rgveda* is described as adorned with the *pada* and *krama* forms of the text (*padakramavibhūṣita*) and as possessing accents at 13.85.4c–5b (cf. also 12.330.35c and 36d—following the immediately previous passage—and 2 App. 2 insert after line 2), while elsewhere recitation of the *pada* and *krama* texts of the *Atharvaveda* is mentioned (1.64.33) and recitation of Vedic texts with the accents taught by the Śikṣās (*svarah śaikṣah*, 9.34.35b, also the office of the *hotṛ* priest, *hotra*, at 32d and various ritual items in neighbouring verses). In order to praise Śiva, Brahmā utters the *rathantara*, Nārāyaṇa sings to him with the *jyeṣṭha sāman* (from the context, presumably the *bārhata sāman* is meant) and Indra sings the *Śatarudrīya* at 13.14.147. Elsewhere in the *Anuśāsanaparvan* there is frequent mention of Vedic sacrifices, sacrificial priests and implements; for example, the Agniṣṭut along with *prāyāscittas* at 13.12.4, the *antarvedi* at 13.60.3a, *adhwaryu*, *chandoga* and *atharvana* priests at 13.95.75, the Gosava and Aptoryāma

²⁰ Comments on the growth of the various books of the *Mahābhārata* will be found in the third chapter. The situation is, of course, quite different with the interpolated passages: explicit mention of eighteen Purāṇas is found in the *phalaśruti* of D1.2 of the *Sabhāparvan* (2.626* 8 pr.) and of Vyāsa as the creator of the eighteen Purāṇas at 18.36* 4 pr./1 pr. (which is, however, found only in the Bombay edition as in effect the start of the *phalaśruti* to the whole epic).

sacrifices at 13.106.13–16, the Atirātra at 13.109.38 and the Dvādaśāha at 13.110.20d. However, the clustering of such mentions in the *Sānti* and *Anuśāsana parvans* indicates that they are learned references owed to brāhmaṇ redactors rather than part of the stock in trade of the *sūtas*, the earlier reciters of the epic.

References to the Brāhmaṇas, Āraṇyakas and Upaniṣads are indeed hardly found outside the *Sānti* and *Anuśāsana parvans*. In addition to the reference already noted to prose (at 3.27.3ab), which probably means the Brāhmaṇas, the *Āraṇyakaparvan* also contains another mention of the Brāhmaṇas at 3.207.20d (within the *Mārkandeyasamāsyā-parvan*); otherwise, they are mentioned at 12.181.1ab, 260.32–33 and at least implied at 12.323.7–9 and 13.90.28cd, while the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* is named at 12.306.11, 16 and 23 and 329.8, and there is most probably a reminiscence of *amādyad indraḥ somena atrpyan brāhmaṇā dhanaiḥ*, cited at *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 13.5.4.18, in *amādyad indraḥ somena dakṣinābhir dvijātayah* at 1.112.9ab and 3.86.6cd. Āraṇyaka occurs only at 5.173.11d outside these two books, where the singular form also occurs at 12.330.32e, 331.3c, 336.28e (in the same verse as mention of Harimedhas) and 337.1b (as *vedāraṇyakam*)—all these in the *Nārāyaṇīya*—the stem form at 12.61.5a and the plural at 12.19.17b. No Upaniṣad is mentioned by name, although at 12.306.33 the Upaniṣad referred to may well be the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, since the verses immediately before refer to the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, and there is probably an allusion at 2.30.35ab (*yājñavalkyo babhūvātha brahmīṣṭho ’dhvaryusattamah*) to the episode in *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 3.1. Mostly the term is linked with the Vedas, as at 3.97.23c, 239.20d (rituals in the Upaniṣad: *upaniṣade kriyāḥ*), 8.63.35 (Vedas with *ākhyāna* as fifth, plus *upavedas*, *upaniṣads*, *rahasyas* and *saṃgrahas*),²¹ 12.236.15a, 13.83.5a and 85.6a (also 2 App. 2.1 and 12 App. 28.266), while at least once the name *Vedānta* is used to designate the Upaniṣads (12.238.20b).²² Significantly, however, there are several instances where *upaniṣad* is used to mean ‘mystery’ or ‘secret’, as at 3.198.62/12.243.11/12.288.13 and 13.77.4c, and particularly in the compound *mahopaniṣad*, found at 6.114.112a, 7.118.18c and 12.326.100a. In addition, S. L. Katre has looked at the meaning of the term *dharmaṇiṣad*, found only at

²¹ The term *upaveda* occurs also at 2.11.24a and 7 App. 25.9.

²² In the mention of the Nyāya of Gautama and the Vedānta at 12.566* (read by the Kumbhakonam edition only) the meaning is, however, clearly the later philosophical schools.

1.1.69b (apart from 1.32*) according to his reading of the text, and offers this literal translation of the verse: ‘The impregnation of the two mothers through Dharma, Vāyu, Śakra, and the two Aśvins by means of the secret *mantras* compelling (the gods to perform the particular duty)’, arguing that ‘*Dharma* stands for *Āpad-dharma* and *upaniṣad* for the *mantragrāma*.’²³

Apart from imitations of the *Rgveda*, such as the hymn to the Aśvins in the *Ādiparvan* (1.3.60–70) studied by Louis Renou, who illustrates the stylistic archaisms employed to achieve this effect,²⁴ there are a certain number of more or less direct citations from Vedic literature in the *Mahābhārata*. 1.223.13, and 5.16.2ab, were compared by Hopkins with RV 1.164.46cd and 10.114.5ab.²⁵ Yudhiṣṭhīra, in his debate with Nahuṣa in the form of a snake mentions at 3.177.28ab the formula *ye yajāmahe*, which comes from *Taittirīya Samhitā* 1.16.11.1; 3.199.9ab is a paraphrase of RV 10.16.9a; 3.201–203 contains a number of parallels to the *Maitrī Upaniṣad* as well as to the *Śāntiparvan* (12.180 and 316).²⁶ At 3.297.46–47, part of the often quoted dialogue between the Yaksā and Yudhiṣṭhīra, there are a few riddles in the style of Vedic *brahmodyas*, which occur at *Vājasaneyī* (23.45–46), *Taittirīya* (7.4.18.1) and *Maitrāyanī* (3.12.19) *Samhitās*, in the *Śatapatha* (13.2.6.10 and 12) and *Taittirīya* (3.9.4.4) *Brahmanas*, and in the *Āśvalāyana* (10.9.2) and *Śāṅkhāyana* (16.5.3–4) *Śrautasūtras*. In the *Udyogaparvan*, at 5.12.20a there is a fairly close quotation from RV 10.117.6; more significantly, there is extensive parallelism between part of the *Sanatsujātiya* and the *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* (Mbh. 5.43.31 and 45.28ab are similar to Śvet. Up. 3.19–20, etc., but there are also briefer parallels with other *Upaniṣads*).²⁷ Similarly, the *Bhagavadgītā* (6.23–40) draws heavily on certain *Upaniṣads*,²⁸ as well as on other parts of Vedic literature and

²³ Katre 1943: 118–122.

²⁴ Renou 1939: 177–187.

²⁵ Hopkins 1901a: 25.

²⁶ These *adhyāyas* form part of the late philosophical dialogue between a brāhmaṇa and a hunter. Hopkins (1901a: 33–46) treats extensively the parallels with the *Maitrī Upaniṣad* and the Critical Apparatus to 12.180 lists the internal *Mahābhārata* parallels also (with minor additions in the Critical Notes).

²⁷ Hopkins has treated this extensively (1901a: 28 and 31–32) and the Critical Apparatus to the *Udyogaparvan* lists many of the parallels, such as 5.45.6 with *Katha Upaniṣad* 6.9, as well as *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* 4.20.

²⁸ Compare BhG. 8.11 with *Kaṭha* Up. 2.15, 2.19–20 with *Kaṭha* Up. 2.18–19, 2.29 with *Kaṭha* Up. 2.7, 2.19–20 with *Kaṭha* Up. 2.18–19, 3.42 with *Kaṭha* Up. 3.10, 15.6 with *Kaṭha* Up. 5.15, 13.15 with *Īśa* Up. 5 and 13.16a with BĀU 4.4.17 and b with *Muṇḍaka* Up. 2.2.6; also, for the image of the *aśvattha* tree, *Kaṭha* Up. 6 init.

some less clearly identifiable ways of thinking, although recently it has been argued that the *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* draws on the *Bhagavadgītā* rather than the other way round.²⁹

There are several verses (at 8.23.32, 12.73.4, 285.5–7 and 306.87) summarising the account of the creation of the four *varṇas* which ultimately goes back to the *Puruṣasūkta* (RV 10.90.14), as Hopkins suggested, although Apte argues that they ‘need not be taken as referring to the account in the R̄gveda, as there are several post-R̄gveda and pre-epic versions of that creation in Vedic literature with which the Mbh. account agrees more closely’.³⁰ The *Sāntiparvan* contains a much larger number of such quotations or paraphrases: there is a reminiscence of RV 7.89.2 in 12.97.20;³¹ similarly, 12.29.117 contains an echo of *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* 8.22.8; 12.233.15–16 is reminiscent of *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 1.5.14; 12.238 appears to be modelled on *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* 3; 12.299.5ab (*dyāvāpṛthivyo iyঃ esa rājan vedesu pathyate*) may refer to any one of three passages beginning *dyāvāpṛthivyoḥ* in the *Kāthaka Saṃhitā* (20.7, 23.3 or 37.15, according to Apte);³² as with the *Sanatsujātiya* and the *Bhagavadgītā*, the *Nārāyaṇīya* too contains a particularly high proportion of such Vedic references, since RV 1.105.17 is echoed in 12.328.41 and in the following *adhyāya* RV 10.129.1–3 is paraphrased in 12.329.3–4 (in prose), while RV 6.16.1 is quoted just afterwards at 6³ (*hito devebhir mānuṣe Jane iti*) and *Taittirīya Saṃhitā* 2.5.1.1 at 17, and there may well be a reference in the next *adhyāya* again to RV 10.121 (*hiranyagarbho . . . chandasi stutah* at 330.31ab).³³

(and Śvet. Up. 3.9). The number of quotations indicates that the *Bhagavadgītā* is deliberately using them for their prestige value and that it must have been composed at a period when these *Upaniṣads* were regarded as authoritative; cf. also Hiltebeitel 1984–85: 1–26. See further on the *Bhagavadgītā* below, in chapters 3 and 5, at pp. 145–48 and 267–77.

²⁹ Thomas Oberlies has tentatively concluded that the *Bhagavadgītā* should be regarded as earlier than the *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad*, which he assigns to the 1st–2nd century A.D. (1988: 57–59, and 1995b: 61–102); cf. BhG. 5.13c with Śvet. Up. 3.18a, 8.9d with Śvet. Up. 3.8b, 13.13–14ab with Śvet. Up. 3.16–17ab (both based on RV 10.81.3, just as the previous verse in Śvet. Up. is identical to RV 10.90.2) and 13.16d with Śvet. Up. 3.13/4.20.

³⁰ Apte 1941: 38 (the whole quotation is italicised by the author for emphasis). However, he does not give details, although a footnote refers to a student of his working on the *Mahābhārata* in relation to ‘the whole of earlier Vedic literature.’ There are, of course, also briefer allusions to this myth of the origin of castes, for example at 5.130.7 (spoken by Kuntī).

³¹ Hopkins (1901a: 24) suggests a similarity also to Mbh. 3.207.47.

³² Apte 1941: 37–38 (the references are to Schroeder’s edition, Leipzig, 1900).

³³ In addition App. 28.168–9 (*gāyanti twā gāyatrinō ’rcanty arkaṁ arkiñāḥ | brahmānam twām śatakratūm ūrdhvam kham iwa menire*) is a close quotation of RV 1.10.1.

The *Anuśāsanaparvan* also contains a larger number than most books: 13.19.7ab echoes RV 4.5.5; 13.40.11d (cf. 13.19.6 and *Manu* 9.17) refers to *Maitrāyanīya Saṃhitā* 1.10.11; 13.75.7ab (*gaur me mātā*) contains a reminiscence of RV 1.164.33ab; 13.83.36c (also 14.24.10a) is very similar to *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* 1.1; and 13.105.16 (*vaiwasvati samyamani janānām yatrānṛte nocaye yatra satyam | yatrābalā balinam yātayanti tatra tvāham hastinām yātayisye*) reflects RV 10.14.1cd. Within the *Anugītā* in the *Āśvamedhikāparvan* there is a parallel to the *Mahānārāyaṇa Upanisad* (*khaṇḍa* 25) at 14.25.14–16. The allusion to RV X.18.1, which Hopkins saw at 15.42.11cd (*devayānā hi panthānah śrūtās te yajñasamstare*), has been challenged by Apte who argues that the two paths, *devayāna* and *pitrīyāna*, are often mentioned in the *Upaniṣads*, which are a more likely source.³⁴ The extent to which such exact or more distant citation of Vedic literature clusters in the philosophically oriented parts of the *Mahābhārata* is very striking and no doubt attests the efforts made by the authors of these passages to buttress the authority of their compositions by this means.

By contrast, the *Rāmāyaṇa*, with its minimal didactic content, has markedly fewer references of any kind to Vedic literature; most of them are in the *Bālakāṇḍa* and usually they are in the most general terms, such as the stereotyped *brāhmaṇa vedapāraṇāḥ* (1.8.15b, 2.12.5b, 13.1b, 23.12b, 65.16b, also 19 times in the text and 18 times in * passages of the *Mahābhārata*).³⁵ Rāyaśrīṅga (who is called *vedavit* at 1.14.1d) says that the sacrifice for sons that he is about to perform for Daśaratha is declared in the *Atharvaśiras* (*atharvaśiras proktair mantraiḥ*, 1.14.2cd) and Hanumān describes Rāma to Sītā as trained in royal learning, ‘familiar with the *Yajurveda*, honoured by those who know the *Veda*, and conversant with archery, *Veda* and *Vedāṅgas*’ (*yajurvedavīnītaś ca vedavidbhiḥ supūjītaḥ | dhanurvede ca vede ca vedāṅgesu ca niṣṭhitāḥ*, 5.33.14). Similarly, Nārada’s definition of Rāma as the ideal figure includes the statement that he ‘knows the truth of *Vedas* and *Vedāṅgas* and is skilled in the lore of archery’ (*vedavedāṅgapāraṇa dhanurvede ca niṣṭhitāḥ*, 1.1.13cd, cf. *vedavedāṅgapāraṇa* at 1.346* 3), while elsewhere in the *Bālakāṇḍa* all four brothers are *Veda*-knowing heroes (1.17.14a) and king Sagara is called *Veda*-knowing as he resolves to perform a sacrifice (1.37.24c).³⁶

³⁴ Hopkins 1901a: 25, and Apte 1941: 37.

³⁵ This *pāda* occurs more commonly in the *Mahābhārata*, at 1.96.51b, 206.1d, 3.3.2a, 62.17d, 93.15b, 211.5b, 8d, 5.107.18b, 138.6b, 7.172.94d, 12.34.16b, 280.13d, 13.23.17b, 123.6d, 14.86.9b and 15.21.2d.

³⁶ Occurrences of the term *veda* are found overwhelmingly in the *Bālakāṇḍa*; the

In the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa*, more specifically, Kausalyā's preceptor is called a teacher of the Taittirīyas (2.29.13c). In a clearly late passage of the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* the less attractive side of brāhmaṇ disputations is put with a condemnation of worldly brāhmaṇs skilled in sophistry (2.94.32–3, in the *kaccit sarga*), where an addition to the dirge on the sorrows of a kingless state gives the absence of men learned in the śāstras debating as another ominous sign (2.1566* 3–4); the only apposite reference occurs in the *Bālakāṇḍa*, where such disputations take place during the year of preparation for the *aśvamedha* (1.13.14). In the opening *sarga* of the *Aranyakāṇḍa* the term *brahmaṇ* is used to designate the Vedas, when a hermitage is described in a stylistically elaborate verse as 'resembling the abode of Brahmā, echoing with the sound of prayer [*brahmaṇ*] and adorned by eminent brāhmaṇs learned in the Vedas [*brahmaṇ*]' (3.1.8); later in that book Jatāyus refers to the Vedas as not open to questioning (*vedaśruti* at 3.48.21). There are also two references in the text to *sāmaga* brāhmaṇs: at 2.70.18 they sing *sāmāni* at Daśaratha's funeral and, in Rāma's description of the rainy season, at 4.27.34 (cf. *Gobhila Grhyasūtra* 3.3), the month Prauṣṭhapada is the time for them to study. After the *Aranyakāṇḍa* allusions become extremely infrequent. In addition to the instance just noted from the *Kiśkindhākāṇḍa* and one earlier from the *Sundarakāṇḍa*, a simile alludes to lost Veda texts (*naṣṭām vedaśrutiṁ yathā*, 4.6.4d), Rāvaṇa is described as *vedavidyāvratasnātah* at 6.80.53a, and at the end of the *Uttarakāṇḍa* the Vedas in the form of brāhmaṇs, the all-protecting *Sāvitri*, *Oṃkāra* and *Vaṣaṭkāra* accompany Rāma as he immolates himself (7.99.8; *Oṃkāra* and *Vaṣaṭkāra* are also personified at 7.81.9c). The only reference to the *R̥gveda* comes in a passage excised from the text, where Hanumān could not have spoken so well if he did not know the *R̥gveda*, *Yajurveda* and *Sāmaveda* (4 App. 3.1–2, cf. 6.3181*).³⁷ In general, the Vedas are referred to more often and in more detail in these passages excluded from the text of the Critical Edition, which also reveal a greater degree of similarity to the pattern in the later parts of the *Mahābhārata*.

full list of its occurrences (including compound forms) in the text of the *Rāmāyaṇa* is: 1.1.13c, 77b, 4.5bc, 5.23b, 6.1b, 8.15b, 11.5d, 12.19b, 13.3b, 14.1d, 17.14a, 37.24c, 49.3d, 64.14d, 2.21.21d, 40.23a, 4.6.4d, 6.80.53a, and 7.99.8a. At 1.513* 3 Rāma and his brothers are proficient in recitation of the Vedas (*vaidikādhyāyane ratāḥ*).

³⁷ Other references to specific texts occur occasionally in such passages, for example *Ātharvanāḥ* alongside the Vedas and their Arīgas at 2.580*, the *Sāmaveda* at 4.1077* 2 (and *sāmans* at 7.317* 9), the *Gāyatrī* at 3.203* 2 and 6 App. 25.61, the *Śatarudrīya* at 2 App. 31.21, as well as mention of specific schools (Katha and Kalāpin at 2.754* 2) and of the exclusion of *sūdras* from hearing the Vedas (3.926*).

Another aspect of the relationship between the *Mahābhārata* and Vedic literature is the extent to which its plot is patterned on ritual concepts and in particular on the notion of sacrifice, the major concern of the Brāhmaṇas. This sacrificial background is depicted at length and in great detail in the first part of the *Ādīparvan*. The whole narrative opens with an awesome but incomplete sacrifice, Janamejaya's snake sacrifice; one of the central episodes is structured around the performance of the *rājasūya*, again interrupted by Yudhiṣṭhīra's defeat at the dice-game, and in some sense the main story is rounded off by his performance of the *aśvamedha*, while the first recitation of the *Rāmāyaṇa* by Kuśa and Lava takes place within the context of Rāma's *aśvamedha*. Furthermore, as Alf Hiltebeitel has succinctly put it: 'Within the same background that produced these sacrificial texts [the Brāhmaṇas], the main contours of the epic's "narrative continuum" would seem to have been shaped as a "ritual of battle." Over a "sacrifice of weapons" (*śastrayajña*), says Karṇa, Krishna will preside as a witness (*vettṛ*) and as the main officiating priest, the *adhvaryu*. The battle, with its preliminaries and aftermath, is Krishna's main theater of operation in the *Mahābhārata*'.³⁸ The events of the *Sauptikaparvan* at the close of the battle can be seen as another sacrifice, indeed as a replay of Dakṣa's sacrifice, while James Laine has seen initiation as a main theme of the *Āranyakaparvan*; he sees this mainly in terms of liminality and Turner's concept of *communitas* but it could also be seen as *dīkṣā* for a sacrificial ritual.³⁹ What is more problematic is the extent to which some of these are integral to the epic in its earliest form, since the first part of the *Ādīparvan*, for example, has long been considered relatively late and the *Āranyakaparvan* has been much expanded.

The structuring of the *Sabhāparvan* around the *rājasūya* ritual has been ably demonstrated by J. A. B. van Buitenen and more will be said on this in the third chapter, in relation to the growth and development of the *Mahābhārata*, while Heino Gehrts has less cogently and in part through inadequacies of interpretation seen the whole *Mahābhārata* narrative as an extended *rājasūya*.⁴⁰ It is clear that the requirements of the *rājasūya* underlie the events of the *Sabhāparvan*

³⁸ Hiltebeitel 1976b: 15–16 (citing Mbh. 5.139.29).

³⁹ Laine 1991: 273–96.

⁴⁰ van Buitenen 1972: 68–74, also the introduction to the *Sabhāparvan* (*Mahābhārata* 1973–78: vol. 2 (1975), 3–30), and Gehrts 1975. See below, pp. 74–75 and 139.

and thus provide a motivation for the dicing match, since it is an integral part of the ritual in the epic just as much as in the ritual manuals. Thomas Oberlies has taken this a stage further by plausibly suggesting that the *tīrthayātrā* in the *Āranyakaparvan* is also influenced by the *rājasūya* and contains reminiscences in the pilgrimage along the Sarasvatī (3.130.1–7) of the *sarasvatīsattras* described in the Brāhmaṇas, as well as suggesting that there are echoes in it of the links of Arjuna and Bhīma with their divine fathers Indra and Vāyu.⁴¹

The large scale on which the frame stories of the *Mahābhārata* are set in the context of the extended sacrificial sessions of the *sattras* of Janamejaya and Śaunaka has been explored from the perspective of Vedic ritual by Christopher Minkowski, who argues that the narrative technique of the epic—the embedding of stories—in itself reveals the influence of the principle of arrangement by which the Vedic sacrifices are ordered.⁴² The narrative starts with two successive levels of narration, to both of which a *satra* is central, and indeed the reasons for Janamejaya performing the *sarpasattra* form the subject matter of the *Āstikaparvan* (1.36–53), where Janamejaya’s intent to perform the sacrifice in order to annihilate all the snakes in the world in revenge for his father Parikṣit’s death by snakebite is averted by Āstika, who saves Takṣaka, the snake who killed Parikṣit, at the last minute; this strikingly parallels the special intervention by Kṛṣṇa to revive Parikṣit, the sole survivor of the epic era, as well as the aspect of the cosmic snake, Śeṣa, as ‘the remainder’. The narrative returns at intervals, and especially at transition points, to these two outer levels of the narrative by Ugraśravas to the sages in the Naimiṣa forest and the narrative which it encapsulates by Vaiśampāyana to Janamejaya, often in language which is highly formulaic.

However, this is by no means the end of the matter. The core of the narrative in the battle books (books 6–9) is then embedded within a further level of narrative, that of Samjaya’s account of the battle to the blind Dhṛtarāṣṭra, an account facilitated by his gift of ‘the divine eye’ by which he can see all that is happening anywhere on the battlefield, thus becoming the ultimate ‘eye-witness’. As Minkowski rightly emphasises, framing stories and embedding are used throughout the epic and the layers are particularly dense in the *Ādi* and *Āranya*ka

⁴¹ Oberlies 1995a.

⁴² Minkowski 1989: 401–420. Minkowski also cites and in part summarises Witzel 1987. Cf. also Minkowski 1991.

parvans, where four and five levels of embedding are found.⁴³ This hierarchical emboxing of one narrative within another cannot be traced further back than the *Mahābhārata* and it is in all probability as a result of influence from the epic that it became such a regular technique not only in the Purāṇas but also in storytelling literature, most famously in the *Pañcatantra*, from which it may well have spread worldwide. The source of the concept, though, as Minkowski argues, is in the recursive structure of the Vedic ritual, with the more elaborate rituals formed not merely by incorporation of smaller rites but rather by their symmetrical and hierarchical structuring around a focus, while the format of the *sattras* even more than of other Vedic sacrifices provides the regular intervals (*karmāntara*) for the telling of suitable stories: ‘the *Mahābhārata* drew its inspiration for using a sustained frame story from the embedding structure of the Vedic ritual’.⁴⁴

Despite problems over the extent to which the employment of such frame stories coincides with parts of the *Mahābhārata* which have clearly been reworked and expanded (as their prominence in the *Ādi* and *Āranyaka parvans* illustrates), this sacrificial background does seem directly to relate to the plot of the epic and to be in keeping with a *kṣatriya* version of the ideology seen in later Vedic literature. In this respect it is more obviously a motivation for the presentation of the *Mahābhārata* in its current form than are the transposition theories of Dumézil and his followers. Indeed, if Vedic mythology rather than ritual is to be invoked as the key to the epic, then weight should be given to Pavel Grintser’s argument that the main narrative of the *Mahābhārata* is based on the myth of Indra’s slaughter of Vṛtra, as well as individual incidents (for example, Duryodhana hiding in the lake may be compared to Indra hiding); one of the points that he makes in support, that the majority of *Mahābhārata* similes are related to Indra mythology, is absolutely valid.⁴⁵

The nature of the epics and of the bards

No doubt eulogies of heroes and cycles of stories underlie the extant epics; traditionally the *Mahābhārata* had an earlier and perhaps more

⁴³ Minkowski 1989: 406.

⁴⁴ Minkowski 1989: 420.

⁴⁵ Grintser 1974.

clearly epic version in the *Bhārata*. The first stage in the establishment of an epic tradition would then have been the progressive clustering of ballads and other material around some central theme, whether the personal vicissitudes of a hero or events of particular importance. Eventually, these cycles may have been linked together into works with a more complex plot. The *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyaṇa* would on this view constitute the end-point of a similar evolutionary process which can be identified, according to some, through a number of intermediate stages. The reciters and preservers of this heroic poetry would be the *sūtas* or bards, who were attached to the courts of chieftains and who recited in short songs and on major festivals the glorious deeds of their lords;⁴⁶ one scholar, in an article on the common introductory formula *tato jayam udīrayet* of the *Mahābhārata*, has rightly seen it as indicating the courtly background of the growth of epic literature.⁴⁷ It would be wrong to think of such story-telling as being the exclusive preserve of the *sūta*; for example, the Pāṇḍavas themselves are recorded as telling each other stories while lodging in the potter's house after Draupadi's *svayamvara*, and these are not the stories typical of *vaiśyas* and *sūdras* nor of brāhmans but tales of war (1.185.11–12, cf. 1.184.11 and also 14.15.5–6). On the other hand, the references from late parts of the *Mahābhārata* to ascetics comforting Satyavān's father with tales of previous kings (3.282.7) and to ascetic sages narrating stories to Dhṛtarāṣṭra (15.26.4, cf. 15.33.1–2) probably reflect the transition of the epic itself into the hands of brāhmaṇ redactors.

It is known that these bards accompanied their masters into battle or the hunt as charioteers (the legal texts consider them to be descendants of the marriage of *kṣatriyas* with brāhmaṇ women, as does the *Anuśāsanaparvan*, at 13.48.10–12), enabling them to base their descriptions of hunting or war scenes on their own first-hand experience. They are not uncommonly linked in the text with two other types of panegyrist, *māgadha* and *bandin* (indeed, not uncommonly in the stereotyped long compound *sūtamāgadhabandin*).⁴⁸ They, and especially the

⁴⁶ The courts to which the *sūtas* were attached were in the early period quite simple, essentially the household of the local chieftain, but must later have grown more elaborate; cf. the discussion of political and military aspects of each epic in chapters 4 and 8 (pp. 162–187 and 400–408).

⁴⁷ Sylvain Lévi (1917).

⁴⁸ The compound *sūtamāgadhabandin* occurs at Mbh. 5.196.18d, 7.5.39d, 50.39b, 55.8b, 8.1.12d, 13.119.15b, 14.63.2b, 15.30.7d, and Rām. 2.6.6b (also 597* 1, 1499* 1,

most famous of them, Lomaharṣaṇa, are sometimes described as *paurāṇika*, meaning however probably ‘knower of traditional tales’ (for example, at Mbh. 1.1.1, 4.1.2, 47.7c, 206.2d, 6.13.41d), in the same way that *purāṇa* is used to qualify *ākhyāṇa* in describing the *Mahābhārata* at 1.2.238ab (and probably at 1.1.15–16). Beside these *sūtas* (distant predecessors of the modern Bhat and Kathak), who would have been the original authors of epic stories, and to whom we owe the oral transmission from generation to generation of various epic cycles, there also figured, in a no less important role, the *kuśilavas*, itinerant ballad-singers to whom we owe the long process of popularisation of the various *chansons de geste* among the mass of the population.⁴⁹ However, the *kuśilavas* were evidently rather despised later in the epic tradition, since the *Śāntiparvan* includes them in a list of such undesirables as beggars and drunks (12.69.49).

Although the two extant epics are based on such traditional bardic material, in the course of time more religious and didactic material was included in them, to such an extent that the *Mahābhārata* in particular has rather lost the character of an epic, since so much of its volume is didactic material. On the face of it, the *Mahābhārata* does give some indication of its own development. The very setting of the scene suggests the process of expansion in transmission by which a *Bhārata* lay of 24,000 verses grew to the *Mahābhārata* of 100,000. Elsewhere there occurs an instance not only of self-reference but also of its narration by brāhmans (*brāhmaṇāḥ kathayisyanti mahābhāratam āhavam*, 5.139.56ab). In a first stage of growth the basic story must have been subject to expansion from within, then in a second stage mythologised and in a third stage entirely taken over by the brāhmanical tradition; finally, after the epic was committed to writing, the number

1812* 46, 1904* 1 and 1905* 2), *sūtamāgadha* at Mbh. 12.38.43b, 59.118d, 15.46.5a, and Rām. 2.23.11d, 75.1b and 82.8b, and in longer metre *māgadhasūta* at Mbh. 3.225.10a. The *sūta* is frequently mentioned in the text (for example at Mbh. 1.1.1, 104.14d, 127.5a, 6b, 206.2d, 212.18a et passim—around 60 times in the first three *parvans* alone—and Rām. 1.1.25c et passim—over one hundred times), the *māgadha* not uncommonly (for example Mbh. 4.65.13c, 67.28d, 7.58.2b, 12.59.118d, 13.48.19b, 22a, 49.10a, 14.69.7a, Rām. 1.5.11a, 2.6.6b, 12.26b, 75.1b and 82.8b), and the *bandin* also quite often (for example Mbh. 12.59.118c, and Rām. 2.6.6b, 13.11d, 14.9c, 23.11a, 59.1c, 82.8a, 4.37.13b and 6.115.13f). Other such eulogists and reciters mentioned in the text include the *kathaka* (Mbh. 1.206.3a), *vaitālika* (Mbh. 2.4.5b, 4.67.28b, 7.58.2c, 12.38.43a, Rām. 6.3547* 1), *pāṇīsvanika* (Mbh. 7.58.2a), *pāṭhaka* (Rām. 7.1540* 20) and *granthika* (Mbh. 14.69.7b).

⁴⁹ Perhaps surprisingly the *Mahābhārata* includes the *kuśilava* among despised categories, such as the *gurutalpaga* (Mbh. 13.90.10e).

of manuscripts needed for the purpose seems to have become virtually a library of Indian tradition, to which new material of all sorts could be added.

A passage in the *Anukramanikāparvan* indicates three starting points for the *Mahābhārata*: ‘some brāhmans, it is said, learn the Bhārata from Manu, some from Āstīka, others from Uparicara . . .’ (1.1.50), or from the story which has its origin in the beginnings of the *Mahābhārata* itself, which starts with the description of the snake sacrifice ordered by Janamejaya, before mentioning a version without the *upākhyānas* in just 24,000 verses, and a summary in 150 verses, the *Anukramaṇi adhyāya* (1.1.61–62). The first declaration has been held to correspond with the names *Jaya*, *Bhārata* and *Mahābhārata* which according to some indicate the main stages in the progressive growth of the poem.⁵⁰ This claimed historical growth of the poem seems to be paralleled, in a passage of the *Ādiwāṃsāvalāraṇaparvan*, by the precise division of its three thematic elements into a trilogy of *bheda*, *rājyavināśa* and *jaya* (1.55.43). From the third of these would then be derived the name of the historical epic story (*itihāsa*) in its original nucleus; this seems at first sight to be confirmed by the affirmation of the *Svargārohana-parvan* (18.5.39a) *jayo nāmetihāso jyam*, and in the controversial *pāda* of the *mangalaśloka* (. . . *tato jayam udīrayet*). But from the context of both passages it seems legitimate to infer simply an equivalence of the terms *Jaya* and *Bhārata* rather than the theory of an independent epic nucleus called *Jaya*. However, some scholars, relying on a line in the same excised passage that refers to Ganeśa as scribe (1 App. I.1 insert l. 15), consider that the extent of this first redaction of the work must have been 8,800 verses, although this figure more probably refers to the number of obscure verses meant to slow Ganeśa down.⁵¹ Once its central core had been fixed, there must have been successive

⁵⁰ R. N. Dandekar (1954) put forward the view that a ‘secular-historical’ tradition co-existed alongside a ‘mythological-ritualistic’ *mantra* tradition, of which the first was fluid, whereas the other soon became fixed. Various ballads were welded together into one around the ‘epoch-making war’ fought at Kuruksetra; this *Jaya* was then gradually transformed into the Epic *Bhārata*, particularly under the impetus of Kṛṣṇaism, whose sponsors made the Epic the vehicle for propagating their religious teaching, by the incorporation both of the *Bhagavadgītā* and of new legends. Subsequently, the activities of brāhmanical redactors, specifically the Bhrgus, transformed the *Bhārata* into the *Mahābhārata*.

⁵¹ Incidentally, P. L. Vaidya (1960) subjected to careful textual critism four obscure passages from the *Karmaparvan* (8.26.45, 66.15, 1096*, 67.33), traditionally said to be *kūtaślokas* (such trick *ślokas* used by Vyāsa to slow Ganeśa), and argues that they are in fact the result of corruption.

amplifications on the part of other (Bhārgava) authors, amplifications chosen from time to time according to a principle of thematic affinity and adapted to the context into which they were to be inserted.

In addition to the transmission claimed in the opening of the *Mahābhārata* itself, where the *sūta* Ugraśravas, son of Lomaharṣaṇa, recites to the sages in the Naimiṣa forest the form of the epic that he heard when Vaiśampāyana recited Vyāsa's *sanhitā* at Janamejaya's great snake sacrifice (1.1.1–19), there is also the tradition that Vyāsa taught the Vedas and the *Mahābhārata* as the fifth Veda to Sumantu, Jaimini, Paila and his own son Śuka, as well as Vaiśampāyana, who separately disseminated the collections (1.57.74–75, cf. 12.337.11). This tradition is invoked to validate the work known as the *Jaiminibhārata*, also often called the *Jaiminīyāśvamedha*, which is a retelling of the *Āśvamedhikaparvan* of the *Mahābhārata* and belongs to the 12th century A.D. at the latest.⁵² This work clearly has its background in the epic material and in the ancient ritual of the *āśvamedha* (which it describes in some detail—indeed its ascription to Jaimini may also reflect this ritual emphasis—but in a form widely divergent from the *Mahābhārata*), but overall it has a pronounced *bhakti* orientation and it was popular in South India, both of which points indicate that it is a relatively late work. It cannot, therefore, represent an alternative recension to that transmitted through Vaiśampāyana but does attest the popular acceptance of the possibility that variant forms of the *Mahābhārata* could exist.

The transmission and evolution of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, while analogous to those of the *Mahābhārata*, are somewhat less complicated, due to its more homogeneous and unitary nature. There is no doubt, though, that the original poem has undergone significant alterations and additions over time. The bards and the *kāvyopajīvins* or *kuślavas* who recited it from memory and who spread it around the country felt the need to embellish and complete the original work by adding longer or shorter chapters, and inserting short stories, descriptive digressions, *māhātmyas* and geographical descriptions in response to the requirements of popular taste and the expectations of their audience; the majority of the interpolations in the second to sixth books are repetitions of events, insertions of pathetic passages and additions of marvellous and supernatural deeds. The story of Nārada's telling Vālmīki

⁵² For information on this work see Petteri Koskikallio (1993 and 1995). J. D. M. Derrett (1970) has identified other secondary epic or purānic material linked with Jaimini in text fragments called *Jaiminirāmāyaṇa* and *Jaiminibhāgavata*.

about Rāma (found at Rām. 1.1.6–76 and 2.1–41) has been seen as evidence for Vālmīki himself as a bard, and the story of Kuśa and Lava (7.62 with App. I.9, and 7.84) as evidence for transmission ‘from the aged teacher to young pupils as is seen today in the living Slavic oral epic tradition.’⁵³ Indeed, the bardic aspect even of the *Bālakāṇḍa* is emphasised. But, whereas Nārada’s reply to Vālmīki suggests both the traditional story and its oral transmission, the next two *sargas* present a rather different image of novelty and innovation. Immediately afterwards, Vālmīki witnesses a hunter killing a crane as it makes love to its mate and this moves him to compassion and to giving utterance to his feelings in a *śloka* (1.2.12–17), confirmed as being a new invention by Brahmā’s words (1.2.29–36). In the third *sarga* Vālmīki, in order to learn more of the story, has recourse to meditation (1.3.1–2), which implicitly suggests thinking out the narrative for himself. This blending of innovation and tradition continues in the account of Kuśa and Lava learning the *Rāmāyaṇa* from Vālmīki—the traditional, oral element—and giving its first public performance before Rāma—the element of innovation (1.4.1–12 and 22–27, also in greater detail in the *Uttarakāṇḍa* at 7.84–85). In these passages, but nowhere else in the text, the work is referred to as a *kāvya* and there is also one allusion to poets (*kavi*, 1.4.20c/212* 2). However, the concept of the work as the *ādikāvya*, the first literary production, only appears in the very late *phalaśrūti*s added at the end of the *Yuddha* and *Uttara kāṇḍas* (also in one added exceptionally to the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa*, 2.2335* 6).

About either the original authors or the reciters and redactors of the epics little is in fact known. Both Vyāsa and Vālmīki appear within the poems of which they are traditionally the authors but the information supposedly conveyed has at the most a symbolic value. In relation to Vyāsa, it has been pointed out: ‘The epic poet’s origin and descent, like the origin and history of the epic heroes is a story of seduction, restored virginity, and substitute fathers (human and divine). Vyāsa, like Karṇa, the first-born of the Pāṇḍavas, is born outside and before his mother’s marriage. Just as Kuntī is the hub of a multivalent set of relations that constitute the epic story, so is Satyavatī the hub of a set of relations that constitute the formal prologue of the poem; her mating with Parāśara is an epic play-within-a-play’

⁵³ Minoru Hara 1972.

that reveals the obscure origins and relations that govern the entire epic text.⁵⁴ Equally it is Satyavatī, after her marriage, who calls on Vyāsa to sire sons by his half-brother Vicitravīrya's widows, Ambikā and Ambālikā, from which are born Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Pāṇḍu, while Vidura is born to the slave-girl substituted for Ambikā the second time.⁵⁵ Though linked in this way with the plot, the figure of Vyāsa nevertheless remains shadowy, which has not prevented speculations about his identity; these have ranged from such flights of fancy as his identification with Berossus, a Babylonian priest who flourished around 300 B.C., to the much more reasonable suggestion by Bruce Sullivan that he represents Brahmā (sharing with him the symbolising of brāhmaical orthodoxy, the creation and dissemination of the Veda, and being frequently called *pitāmaha*, 'grandfather').⁵⁶ Sullivan examines the portrayal of Vyāsa within the *Mahābhārata* as seer, priest, ascetic and spiritual preceptor and highlights three episodes where Vyāsa intervenes in the plot—fathering Dhṛtarāṣṭra, Pāṇḍu and Vidura, supervising Yudhiṣṭhīra's *rājasūya*, and attempting to reconcile the combatants—demonstrating the disastrous consequences for the Bharatas of all three, as well as the limited number of identifications of Vyāsa with Nārāyaṇa (of which the most significant is his revelation that he is Nārāyaṇa's incarnation in the very late *Nārāyanīya*). Sullivan also supplies a plausible reason for lack of subsequent recognition of the identity proposed in the decline in Brahmā's religious significance.

Vālmīki is less involved in the action of the *Rāmāyaṇa* until the late *Uttarakāṇḍa*. Camille Bulcke traces references to the name Vālmīki and stories about him, and studies the historical development of these stories, concluding that there must have been at least three different individuals bearing the name, one of them connected with the Bhārgava family in the *Mahābhārata*, since his story is mixed up with that of Cyavana Bhārgava.⁵⁷ A well known later tradition makes Vālmīki a bandit who preyed on passing travellers to support his

⁵⁴ Barbara Stoler Miller 1992: 111–12.

⁵⁵ This episode is narrated at 1.99–100. It is possibly this that has given rise to the incident alluded to by Aśvaghoṣa, that Vyāsa made love in Kāśī with a beautiful prostitute who kicked him with her foot (*Buddhacarita* 1.42 and *Saundarananda* 7.29–30), through a folktale form of the incident, as Sullivan suggests (1990a).

⁵⁶ Buddha Prakash 1951; Sullivan 1990b and 1994.

⁵⁷ Bulcke 1958–59a and 1958–59b. U. J. Sandesara (1958–59) makes some additions and corrections to Bulcke's references.

family but was brought to a realisation of the error of his ways when one of his victims asked whether his family were willing to share the burden of his sin and he discovered that they would not; thereupon, he became an ascetic and sat absorbed in meditation for so long that a termite mound (*valmīka*) grew over him—hence his name.⁵⁸

In form and content both epics share marked similarities. Both are set within a frame narrative that emphasises their transmission over time and yet their traditional authors are involved within the plot that they narrate, both deal with intrigues at court and as a result involve a lengthy period of exile, which has been brought about by underhand means, and they both culminate in a major war. However the differences are just as striking. In the *Mahābhārata* that culminating battle is viewed with considerable ambivalence and its heroes are very human in their doubts and uncertainties—the overall attitude may be summed up as that *dharma* is difficult to discern—whereas in the *Rāmāyaṇa* there is no doubt that Rāvaṇa is evil and deserves to be defeated, and Rāma has no qualms or uncertainty about his mission. Most obviously of all the result of the battle is very different: it is a devastated kingdom and a world gone to wrack and ruin which Yudhiṣṭhīra gains from the defeat of the Kauravas (indeed traditionally the death of Krṣṇa—and often popularly the end of the war itself—marks the start of the fourth and worst age of the world, the Kaliyuga), whereas Rāma returns to a rejoicing Ayodhyā and inaugurates ten thousand years of ideal rule, of Rāmarājya.

The main theme of the *Mahābhārata* is the rivalry between the two sets of cousins, the Pāṇḍavas and the Kauravas, which culminates in the great battle of Kurukṣetra. Its nucleus is this great war lasting eighteen days; the poem narrates all the circumstances leading up to the war as well as the war itself and its outcome. However, it has undergone extensive addition and modification in the process of transmission over the centuries. The core of the *Mahābhārata* was obviously composed after the early Vedic period, since the area where the conflict is set lies well east of the Pañjāb, in which the *Rgveda* is located. On the other hand, knowledge of the rivers Gaṅgā and Yamunā is not complete. Whether or not the conflict as recorded in the epic

⁵⁸ The first recorded form of this story is in the *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa* 2.6.64–86 but it may well be older, though not recorded within the ‘Vālmīki’ *Rāmāyaṇa*. Incidentally, Vālmīki also appears briefly in the *Mahābhārata* at 13.18.7.

ever took place, a struggle for control over the upper Gāngā and Yamunā obviously seemed plausible to its first audiences and such a struggle is likely to have been an aspect of the eastward movement of the Aryans. The poem may originally have described a local feud but, if so, it caught the imagination of the bards and in its final form the whole of India took part, in the same way that in the *Iliad* all the Greek world took part in the siege of Troy. In reality, however, the more eastern areas of Kosala, on which the *Rāmāyaṇa* is centred, and Magadha, where the Buddha and Mahāvīra preached, do not play an important role in the *Mahābhārata*. On the basis of these hints (they are no more than that), it seems probable that the origins of the *Mahābhārata* fall somewhere between the 8th and 9th century.⁵⁹ However, we do not have nearly so old a text, since, unlike the Vedas, the epics are popular works, transmitted orally and subject to change, whose reciters would not necessarily be inhibited about updating what they were transmitting. There is therefore general agreement that the oldest parts preserved are not likely to be appreciably older than about 400 B.C. However, the *Mahābhārata* has undergone so many reworkings that old and new are by now perhaps inextricably mixed in much of it, although it is clear that certain parts, for example the *Śānti* and *Anuśāsana parvans*, are later than the core narrative. It has also had added to it the *Hariwamśa*, which contains a full account of Kṛṣṇa's life and which, though notionally a supplement to the *Mahābhārata*, also points forward to the Purāṇas.

The *Rāmāyaṇa*, by contrast, even as now preserved, is still a relatively unified heroic poem, which tradition attributes to the authorship of Vālmīki, the *ādikavi*, that is the first poet to give life to a poem that was different in conception, extent and style from the ancient poetry sung by the bards; its style is more polished than that of the *Mahābhārata* and, while still remaining part of what can be identified as the epic tradition, is in origin clearly the work of an author with a real feeling for and command of these conventions, an author whom it is convenient to call Vālmīki. The core of the *Rāmāyaṇa* lies in its books 2–6, for there can be little doubt that all of the *Uttarakāṇḍa* (book 7) is a later addition and the *Bālakāṇḍa* (book 1), at least in its

⁵⁹ This is the view of van Buitenen (*Mahābhārata* 1973–78: vol. 1, *The Book of the Beginning*, xxiv). An older estimate for the date of the war, achieved by means that have now fallen into some discredit, was around 950 B.C., made by F. E. Pargiter (1922: 175–183).

present form, cannot have belonged to the original work, on the evidence both of language and contents. As already indicated, there is no trace whatsoever in the Vedas of the Rāma story and only the faintest of traces of any of its characters; it is clear, though, that Vālmīki did not create this work out of nothing. He must have had before him some ancient Rāma ballads still distinct from the poem, as has been argued by several scholars from the fact that the *gāthās* of the *Tripitaka* (written after the 3rd century B.C.) allude several times to the history of Rāma but never to the Vālmīki *Rāmāyaṇa*. Also, it is argued, Rāma legends are found spread throughout India—not only among Hindus but also among Jains and Buddhists—and outside India in the whole Indian cultural area; and indeed it is interesting to note that there are differences, at times substantial, between these versions. The *Dasarathajātaka*, which Weber first considered the source of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, represents for Sukumar Sen and Przyluski the most ancient form known of the Rāma legend, but the possibility cannot be excluded that, as Keith thought, both the *Jātaka* and the *Rāmāyaṇa* go back to a more ancient common source. Certainly, the presence of variants on the periphery of the Indian cultural area lends some support to the hypothesis that these go back to popular traditions co-existent with the Vālmīki *Rāmāyaṇa*, traditions either unknown to Vālmīki or deliberately excluded by him.

On the other hand, the whole *Rāmāyaṇa*, including its first and last books, was well known before the *Mahābhārata* received its final form by the 4th century A.D. Although the *Rāmāyaṇa* does not contain as many archaic features as the *Mahābhārata* and gives the general impression of being the later of the two, the *Mahābhārata* contains as one of its episodes the story of Rāma in a form derived from the *Rāmāyaṇa*. Probably the *Rāmāyaṇa* had reached its present state (apart from limited additions) by the 3rd century but its oldest parts may well be as early as any part of the *Mahābhārata*.

It can be argued that the particular character of the epics is in part due to their position at a time of transition, that their apparent historicity lies in the fact of a later period reflecting on an earlier one, and that this reflecting is brought to an end by the transition from an oral to a written tradition. Certainly, as we shall see in subsequent chapters, the largely pastoral society of the heroic age in which lineages were the main political factor is replaced during the period of growth of the epics by a clearly agrarian society accompanied by

the rise of urban centres and the emergence of a state system. Some of the apparent contradictions and inconsistencies are probably due to the reflections in the texts of this change from lineage-based societies to monarchical states. The shift from a more inclusive society to the more stratified pattern so often seen as the hallmark of Indian society can to quite an extent be traced in both epics. In their extant forms each of the poems has a distinct location and the narrative of each is concerned with one of the two main royal dynasties of ancient India. The *Mahābhārata* centres on the western Gaṅgā basin, which it terms *madhyadeśa* ‘the middle region’, and on the Lunar dynasty (Candra or Soma), while the *Rāmāyaṇa* focuses on the middle Gaṅgā basin and on the Ikṣvāku dynasty. The link with ritual is there in the frameworks of each epic but there is equally the link with the courts of the aggrandising monarchies of the late first millennium B.C. This is undoubtedly seen also in the way in which the epics—and this is by no means limited to India—have been used to bestow legitimacy on a later political set-up; the lists of chiefs and peoples taking part in the *Mahābhārata* war and the attempts by so many later dynasties to trace their origins from the epic heroes are merely the most obvious manifestations of this.

The plot of the Mahābhārata

Traditionally, the *Mahābhārata* is ascribed to the sage Vyāsa—to whom are also often ascribed the Vedas and the Purāṇas—but this name in reality means ‘arranger’ or ‘compiler’ and, although he is supposedly the natural grandfather of the heroes (brought in by his mother Satyavatī to produce sons by the widows of his half-brothers, thus fathering Dhṛtarāṣṭra, Pāṇḍu and Vidura) and a witness of the battle, Vyāsa remains a mythological figure, whose historicity is doubtful. In fact, as already mentioned, the narration of the epic is on three levels: the work opens with the words of the *sūta* Ugraśravas, son of Lomaharṣaṇa, to the brāhmans assembled in the Naimiṣa forest for Śaunaka’s twelve-year *sattra*, declaring that he has just come from Janamejaya’s great snake sacrifice, at which Vaiśampāyana narrated the stories that constitute the *Mahābhārata*, as he heard them from its composer Vyāsa, thus bringing us to the third (or first) layer in its transmission.

The *Ādiparvan*, ‘The Book of the Beginning’ announces the great story but then spends over fifty *adhyāyas* on other matters before starting

the story of the Pāṇḍavas and Kauravas, thus fulfilling its role as an introductory book, dealing with origins in general and the origins and childhood of the epic's heroes in particular. It details the descent of both the feuding parties from Bharata, the mythical ancestor of the Kurus, who reigned in the upper Gangā basin in the area of modern Delhi and whose birth is narrated in the story of Śakuntalā (1.62–69). The fathers of the contesting parties, Pāṇḍu and Dhṛtarāṣṭra, were brothers and were educated together by their uncle Bhīṣma, whose birth as king Śaṃtanu's son is narrated later, as well as his abduction of Ambā. Dhṛtarāṣṭra married Gāndhārī, who had a hundred sons, often called the Kauravas, while Pāṇḍu married two wives, Kuntī and Mādrī, but is cursed to die if he engages in sexual intercourse. Kuntī uses a boon to invoke various gods and to conceive three sons by them: Yudhiṣṭhira by Dharma, Bhīma by Vāyu and Arjuna by Indra. She then offers use of the boon to Mādrī who uses it to bear the twins Nakula and Sahadeva by the Aśvins. Mādrī is subsequently implicated in Pāṇḍu's death, since despite the curse he attempts intercourse with her, and she voluntarily ascends his funeral pyre, leaving the other wife, Prthā or Kuntī, to survive her husband and bring up their five sons. Since Dhṛtarāṣṭra was born blind he is ineligible to rule and so Pāṇḍu has become the king. The two sets of cousins are brought up together in Hāstinapura—as they grow up they learn weaponry from their uncle Drona—and Dhṛtarāṣṭra acts as regent until Yudhiṣṭhira's majority. However, the sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra are jealous of their cousins and plot to assassinate them by setting fire to the house made of lac in which the five Pāṇḍavas and their mother are staying, but they escape secretly through an underground passage. Later they attend the contest for the hand of king Drupada's daughter, Draupadī (also called Krṣṇā), where Arjuna wins her by a feat of archery and the five brothers jointly marry her. On their return, Dhṛtarāṣṭra assigns them half the kingdom, the Khāṇḍava tract, where they establish their capital of Indraprastha; thus, the issue of who should rule is temporarily resolved or rather postponed. Subsequently, Arjuna is involved in the abduction of Subhadrā, Krṣṇa's sister, and together with Krṣṇa in the burning of the Khāṇḍava forest.

The epic proper begins in the second book, the *Sabhāparvan*. After some years, following campaigns in the four directions to make Yudhiṣṭhira a universal emperor, the Pāṇḍavas erect a magnificent palace at Indraprastha and there celebrate a great sacrifice to mark their conquests and the killing of king Jarāsamṛda of Magadha as part of

Yudhiṣṭhīra's *rājasūya*. The Kauravas already resent the growing power of the Pāṇḍavas and this splendidly arranged event—as well as the mishaps that befall him in their palace—inflames the jealousy of Dur-yodhana, whose uncle Śakuni gives him the idea of challenging the Pāṇḍavas to a game of dice, knowing Yudhiṣṭhīra's weakness for gambling. In the rigged game which follows, Yudhiṣṭhīra first loses all his wealth and then pledges his brothers and himself as stakes; after this he stakes Draupadī, their joint wife, only to lose her too. The menstruating Draupadī is insulted by Duḥśāsana, who drags her into the assembly hall, the *sabhā*, and attempts to strip her in front of everyone, but the attempt miraculously fails and, after Draupadī has asked the unanswerable question of whether Yudhiṣṭhīra could legitimately stake her, Dhṛtarāṣṭra intervenes to grant Draupadī her freedom and that of her husbands. However, Yudhiṣṭhīra is called back as they return and challenged to a repeat match; on an all or nothing throw, with a period of exile wagered against restoration of everything that had been lost, Yudhiṣṭhīra loses again. So sadly the brothers prepare to depart for twelve years of exile in the forest and a thirteenth year incognito before they can reclaim their own.

The book which describes the first twelve years of exile, the *Āranyakaparvan* or 'Book of the Forest', is very heterogeneous, being a real storehouse of myths, legends and instructions of all sorts, told to relieve the tedium of life in the forest; it includes among others the famous story of Sāvitrī (3.277–283) and that of Nala and Damayantī (3.50–78), as well as a substantial summary of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the *Rāmopākhyāna* (3.257–275), and the narrative of Arjuna's journey to the Himālayas and his encounter with Śiva disguised as a Kirāṭa (3.13–42). It also contains the *Tīrthayātrāparvan*, 'the tour of the sacred sites' (3.80–153), which is our earliest textual evidence for the cult of pilgrimage (though clearly quite a late insertion in the epic); this contains not only two lists of *tīrthas* but also the account of how the other four brothers go on a tour of them, during the period that Arjuna is on his journey to Indra's heaven. Totalling 202 *adhyāyas*, the *Āranyakaparvan* is one of the longest books of the epic (only the *Śāntiparvan* at 353 *adhyāyas* and the *Ādiparvan* at 205 are longer; the *Sabhāparvan* has 72).

The five brothers eventually decide to spend the final year of their exile at the court of the Matsya king, Virāṭa, who gives his name to the fourth book, the *Virāṭaparvan*; in order to disguise themselves, they hire themselves out as servants to the court and live there uneventfully until almost the end of their time, when first Kīcaka's advances

to Draupadī with Bhīma's drastic revenge and then the Kauravas' raid on the Matsyas' territory threaten to unmask them. However, they last out and, when the thirteen years are over, they disclose their identities to the astonished Virāṭa, who also offers his daughter Uttara to Arjuna (who accepts her as bride for his son Abhimanyu). Despite containing the narrative of an eventful year, this is a relatively short book (67 *adhyāyas*).

In the fifth book, the *Udyogaparvan* or 'Preparation for War' (another long book at 197 *adhyāyas*), after the failure of negotiations for a peaceful solution to their claim for the return of their kingdom, the Pāṇḍavas begin actively to enlist support and allies, as do the Kauravas. Krṣṇa himself joins the Pāṇḍavas as a non-combatant, while his army is committed to Duryodhana, who leads the Kauravas. Bhīṣma, Droṇa and Karṇa also join the Kauravas, the first two out of obligation to them, Karṇa out of friendship and loyalty. Krṣṇa makes a final effort at mediation, which fails; thereafter, both sides select their commanders in chief: Bhīṣma for the Kauravas and Dhṛṣṭadyumna, Draupadi's brother, for the Pāṇḍavas. Among the expansions contained in this book is the *Sanatsujātiya* (5.42–45) a substantial philosophical digression.

With the sixth book, the *Bhīṣmaparvan* (117 *adhyāyas*), Saṃjaya's account of the great battle begins, for Vyāsa briefly appears to Dhṛtarāṣṭra and grants him a boon to remedy his blindness: this is that his charioteer Saṃjaya, endowed with supernatural vision, shall narrate to him every detail of the battle. As the two armies are drawn up ready for battle, Arjuna is suddenly afflicted with doubts and turns to his charioteer, Krṣṇa, for advice, whereupon Krṣṇa expounds the *Bhagavadgītā* (6.23–40). Bhīṣma leads the Kauravas for the first ten days and the narration of each day's fighting takes up the greater part of the book, which ends with the pathetic description of the mortally wounded Bhīṣma lying on a bed of arrows.

The next three books, the *Dronaparvan* (173 *adhyāyas*), *Karṇaparvan* (69) and *Śalyaparvan* (64), are also named after the successive commanders-in-chief of the Kauravas. The *Dronaparvan* relates the heroic death of Arjuna's son, Abhimanyu, followed by Arjuna's revenge which results in the death of Jayadratha, an all-night battle between the fourteenth and fifteenth days ending with the death of Ghaṭotkaca, and the treacherous killing of Droṇa on the fifteenth day of the war. The *Karṇaparvan* details the fighting on the sixteenth and seventeenth days, including both Bhīma's bloodthirsty revenge on Duḥśāsana for his humiliation of Draupadī and Karṇa's death at the hands of Arjuna.

In the *Śalyaparvan*, on the final, eighteenth day of the war, Duryodhana approaches Aśvatthāman to lead the Kaurava forces but he suggests Śalya, who is then chosen as the Kaurava leader but, amid scenes of general carnage, is soon killed by Yudhiṣṭhira's *sakti*; Yudhiṣṭhira also kills Śalya's younger brother when he tries to avenge Śalya's death. Duryodhana now takes over but the Kaurava army has many setbacks and Duryodhana briefly takes refuge in a lake, before agreeing to a mace duel with Bhīma. Balarāma now arrives after a pilgrimage of forty-two days (described at length by Vaiśampāyana in another *Tīrthayātrāparvan*, 9.29–53) and suggests that the duel should take place at Samatapañcaka. After a long, fierce duel with neither gaining the advantage, Kṛṣṇa hints that Bhīma should remember his vow to break Duryodhana's thighs, Arjuna signs to him by slapping his own thigh, and Bhīma shatters Duryodhana's thigh with his mace; Duryodhana is disabled and falls dying, while Balarāma protests at the foul blow and Duryodhana himself berates Kṛṣṇa for the underhand tactics that the Pāṇḍavas have used, at his instigation, against Bhīṣma, Droṇa, Karṇa, Bhūriśravas and now himself. All the Pāṇḍava warriors, along with Kṛṣṇa, go to Duryodhana's camp and then Yudhiṣṭhira sends Kṛṣṇa to Hāstinapura to console Gāndhārī.

In the tenth book, the *Sauphikaparvan*, 'Book of the Sleeping Warriors', the three remaining Kaurava warriors, Aśvatthāman and two companions, mount a nocturnal raid on the camp of the victorious Pāṇḍavas, in which the whole army is massacred (apart from the absent Pāṇḍava brothers and Kṛṣṇa, who have gone to the capital) and the camp is burnt. The three Kaurava warriors report their achievement to Duryodhana before he dies. With this brief book (just 18 *adhyāyas*), Saṃjaya's account of the battle is concluded.

The *Strīparvan*, the 'Book of the Women' (27 *adhyāyas*), opens with Dhṛtarāṣṭra's laments, which are followed by Vidura's philosophising. Next the Kaurava widows, headed by Gāndhārī, visit the battlefield to lament over the fallen warriors and are followed by Dhṛtarāṣṭra. Yudhiṣṭhira and his brothers also arrive and there are mutual recriminations and confessions. Gāndhārī's wish to curse the Pāṇḍavas is averted by the arrival of Vyāsa but she holds Kṛṣṇa responsible for the slaughter and curses him instead. Yudhiṣṭhira gives orders for the cremation of the dead, while Dhṛtarāṣṭra and others go to the Gaṅgā to offer libations to the dead.

The war is over but the great epic continues with its longest book, the *Śāntiparvan*, the 'Book of the Peace' (353 *adhyāyas*). Yudhiṣṭhira is

congratulated on the victory for his side but he regards it as no real victory and cannot be reassured by his brothers. Vyāsa persuades Yudhiṣṭhīra to seek advice from Bhīṣma but first his installation is performed. Yudhiṣṭhīra then goes to the battle field, where Bhīṣma is lying, still alive, on a bed of arrows. At Kṛṣṇa's request Bhīṣma then preaches in this and the next book, the *Anuśāsanaparvan*, 'Book of Instruction' (154 *adhyāyas*), long sermons on ethics and philosophy in response to questions from Yudhiṣṭhīra. These are subdivided into four subsections: the *Rājadharmaparvan* (12.1–128) on the duties of a king in normal times, the *Āpaddharmaparvan* (12.129–167) on his duties in times of distress, the *Mokṣadharmaparvan* (12.168–353) on the way to release, and the *Dānadharmaparvan* (13.1–152) supposedly on the merits of giving; within the third of them is included the *Nārāyaṇīya* (12.321–339), an early Pāñcarātra text. Interesting as much of this material is for our understanding of the development of Hinduism, it has little to do with the epic proper. The *Anuśāsanaparvan* in particular is very mixed in its contents. It opens with Yudhiṣṭhīra declaring that he has still not been able to regain peace of mind and Bhīṣma stating that everyone is subject to destiny, before a series of questions from Yudhiṣṭhīra prompt answers from Bhīṣma on topics such as the conquest of death, how Viśvāmitra became a brāhmaṇa, kindness as the greatest virtue, the results of *karma*, the abode of Śrī, the degree of pleasure in sexual intercourse experienced by man and woman, the names of Śiva, and so on and so forth.

The basic story is resumed and in a sense concluded in the fourteenth book, the *Āśvamedhikaparvan*, 'Book of the Horse Sacrifice' (96 *adhyāyas*), in which, to atone for his and his brothers' misdeeds and to mark his sovereignty, Yudhiṣṭhīra undertakes a horse sacrifice, at which Vyāsa is the chief officiant. This book also includes the *Anugītā* (14.16–50, supposedly a repeated version of the *Bhagavadgītā* but in reality somewhat different in tone), the story of Uttanka (14.51–55) and the narrative of the still-birth of Parīkṣit and his revival (14.65–68).

In the *Āśramavāsikaparvan*, 'The Stay at the Hermitage' (47 *adhyāyas*), after nearly fifteen years, during which he is honoured by Yudhiṣṭhīra and Arjuna but insulted by Bhīma and the twins, the blind Dhṛtarāṣṭra resolves to retire to the forest as a *vānaprastha*, accompanied by Gāndhārī, Kuntī and Vidura, and through Vyāsa's aid is granted a vision of the dead warriors. Subsequently Nārada arrives at Hāstina-pura and describes how Dhṛtarāṣṭra, Gāndhārī and Kuntī have all perished in a forest fire. This and the remaining books narrate a variety

of events, some only marginally related to the preceding events. The *Mausalaparvan*, ‘The Book of the Clubs’ (8 *adhyāyas*), tells the story of the deaths of Balarāma and Kṛṣṇa in the general extermination of the Andhakas and Vṛṣnis. The train of events begins when some of the Yādavas dress up Kṛṣṇa’s son, Sāmba, as though he were pregnant and ask some visiting sages to predict the sex of the child; enraged at the slight, they reply that it will be an iron club, *musala*, which will destroy the entire Yādava clan. Although the club is ground to powder and thrown into the sea, it reappears as a spiky sea grass which is used by the Yādavas as weapons when later the celebration of a festival turns into a brawl. A wholesale slaughter ensues and soon afterwards Kṛṣṇa is killed by a hunter’s arrow and his capital Dvārakā is submerged by the sea. Next, in the *Mahāprasthā-nikaparvan*, ‘The Book of the Great Departure’ (3 *adhyāyas*), after learning about the fate of the Yādavas and Kṛṣṇa’s death, the Pāṇḍavas renounce the world, after installing Arjuna’s grandson as king. They start first towards the east but then make their way towards the Himalayas, dying one by one on the way; Draupadī is the first to fall (her failing according to Yudhiṣṭhira being her partiality for Arjuna), then Sahadeva, Nakula, Arjuna and Bhīma. In the *Svargārohaṇaparvan*, ‘The Book of the Ascent to Heaven’ (5 *adhyāyas*), after further tests which involve his refusal to leave the dog which depends on him, Yudhiṣṭhira himself enters heaven.

The plot of the Rāmāyaṇa

The *Rāmāyaṇa* narrates the story of Rāma, ranging from accounts of intrigue at court to wanderings among ascetics in the forest, and culminating in the great battle when the Rākṣasa Rāvaṇa is defeated and punished for his abduction of Rāma’s wife, Sītā. Indian tradition is unanimous that the original version was composed by a sage called Vālmīki and then transmitted orally, but the version now extant was undoubtedly composed over many centuries between perhaps 500 B.C. and A.D. 300, during which period it was also committed to writing. It is now divided into seven *kāṇdas* or books.⁶⁰

The first book, the *Bālakāṇda*, is in fact a later addition composed

⁶⁰ The summary in this and the following paragraphs is taken with some adaptations from Brockington 1984: 1–8.

to narrate Rāma's birth, youthful exploits and marriage, and generally to provide the framework for the narrative. It opens indeed with Vālmīki asking Nārada whether there exists in the world nowadays a truly exemplary individual and receiving the unequivocal answer that he is Rāma. The birth of Rāma and his three brothers is narrated in miraculous terms: Daśaratha is childless and in his anxiety for an heir performs first a horse sacrifice and then another sacrifice for sons. At the gods' request, Viṣṇu decides to become incarnate as Daśaratha's four sons as the only means of destroying Rāvaṇa, the evil king of Laṅkā, and the other gods procreate the Vānara heroes. In due course, four sons are born: Rāma and Bharata play the chief roles, while the twins Lakṣmaṇa and Śatrughna each attach themselves to one of their half-brothers as loyal but subservient companions. When Rāma is fifteen, the sage Viśvāmitra comes to court to ask for Rāma to protect his sacrifice against the attacks of the Rākṣasas Mārīca and Subāhu. This mission successfully accomplished, the sage takes Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa to attend King Janaka's sacrifice at Mithilā. We learn of Sītā's miraculous birth, and of Śiva's bow, which no man has strength to string; Rāma not merely bends but breaks the bow, and with Daśaratha's consent, Rāma is married to Sītā, Lakṣmaṇa to her sister, and Bharata and Śatrughna to her cousins. As the party return to Ayodhyā, Rāma's status is further enhanced by an encounter with the belligerent Rāma Jāmadagnya.

The original story would have begun with some version of the court intrigues which open the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa*, now the second book. Here the listener is introduced to the aging king of Ayodhyā, Daśaratha, his wives Kausalyā, Kaikeyī and Sumitrā, and the four princes, Rāma, Bharata, Lakṣmaṇa and Śatrughna. Daśaratha decides, amid general approval from the citizens, to install Rāma as *yuvārāja*, 'young king' or heir-apparent. However, Kaikeyī is persuaded by her servant Mantharā to plot to have him supplanted by her son, Bharata, and banished to the forest for fourteen years. Daśaratha feels compelled to give in to her petulance because of two boons he has previously granted her, but his agony of mind in doing so is touchingly portrayed; so profound is his grief that he dies shortly after Rāma's departure from Ayodhyā, attributing his death, separated from his son, to retribution for having accidentally killed an ascetic. His distress is shared by almost all the inhabitants of the town, but not by Rāma himself, who accepts the decree with absolute submission and with the calm self-control which regularly

characterises him. In order to fulfil his father's commands as fully as possible, he suggests sending messengers to recall Bharata, who is away from Ayodhyā on a visit (and so innocent and ignorant of his mother's machinations). Rāma then makes preparations for his departure with no protest whatsoever, accompanied at their individual insistence by his wife Sītā and his brother Lakṣmaṇa. The trio soon evade the huge crowd of mourning citizens who flock after them and make their way, first by chariot, then on foot, to mount Citrakūṭa, visiting on the way the Niṣāda chief Guha and the ascetic Bharadvāja. On Citrakūṭa they construct a hermitage, where they live happily for some time, enjoying the beauties of nature.

Following Daśaratha's death, the ministers vividly describe the evils of a kingless state. Bharata is urgently recalled to Ayodhyā, where he overthrows his mother's schemes by angrily rejecting the proffered kingdom and setting off, accompanied by the three queens and a huge retinue, to fetch Rāma back. They too meet Guha and are entertained to a miraculous banquet by Bharadvāja. Rāma greets Bharata with none of the rancour displayed by the excitable Lakṣmaṇa, enquiring calmly about his conduct of public affairs, but he insists on carrying out to the letter his father's express wish, undeterred by Bharata's impassioned pleas and offers to change places with him. Eventually, Bharata and his entourage return to Ayodhyā, taking with them Rāma's sandals as a symbol of his authority; Bharata retires to nearby Nandigrāma, from where he administers the country as Rāma's regent. Meanwhile, Rāma and his companions decide to leave Citrakūṭa for a more remote part of the forest, going by way of the hermitage of Atri and Anasūyā.

The third book, the *Aranyakāṇḍa*, narrates the exiles' life among the hospitable, respectful sages and the hostile Rākṣasas of the Daṇḍaka forest. Despite Rāma's resolve to live like an ascetic, his role as the perfect *kṣatriya* now becomes increasingly prominent: first, the brothers have to rescue Sītā from the clutches of a Rākṣasa, Virādha, and then the sages extract a pledge from Rāma to protect them against the ravages of the Rākṣasas. This is the occasion for a homily by Sītā on avoiding aggression and a defence of his role by Rāma. For ten years Rāma and his party wander among the sages; there are specific accounts of their visits to Śarabhaṅga, Sutikṣṇa, and to Agastya, who gives him divine weapons and advises him to build a hermitage in nearby Pañcavatī; on the way there, they meet the vulture Jatāyus, who narrates his lineage and offers them his protection.

While they are living in the hut which they have built in Pañcavaṭī, the hideous but none the less amorous Rākṣasī Śūrpaṇakhā makes advances to the brothers; infuriated by their mockery and disdain, she attacks Sītā, and Lakṣmaṇa mutilates her as a punishment. Her brother Khara attempts to avenge her, first by sending a band of fourteen Rākṣasas to kill the brothers and then, after they have all been killed, by leading an army of fourteen thousand to attack them; however, Rāma alone defeats them all. Śūrpaṇakhā then works out another way of taking revenge through another brother, Rāvaṇa, king of Laṅkā, whom she incites to abduct Sītā by exciting his lust. He compels the aid of the unwilling Mārīca, whose disguise as a golden deer and feigned call for help induce Sītā to send both brothers after it; Rāvaṇa, disguised as a mendicant, thus has no difficulty in seizing her. Jaṭāyus is fatally wounded when he attempts to intervene, and Sītā is taken to Laṅkā, where, having vehemently rejected all Rāvaṇa's blandishments, she is confined in a grove of *āsoka* trees. Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa meanwhile are in great distress, but the dying Jaṭāyus tells them what has happened, and the monster Kabandha advises them to ally themselves with the Vānara leader Sugrīva, who will help them to recover Sītā. On their way to find him they meet a Śabarī ascetic-woman.

Book four is called the *Kiṣkindhākānda*, since it focuses on events in or relating to the Vānara capital Kiṣkindhā. By lake Pampā the two princes are accosted by Hanumān, the minister of the exiled Vānara king Sugrīva, who takes them to his master. Rāma and Sugrīva make a solemn pledge of alliance, and Rāma is encouraged by the sight of some of Sītā's clothes and ornaments which, seeing a group of Vānaras, she had thrown down as Rāvaṇa abducted her. Sugrīva next enlists Rāma's help in ousting his usurping brother Vālin, and recounts the history of their quarrel from his side. Encouraged by Rāma, Sugrīva challenges Vālin to single combat and finally, with Rāma's covert assistance, Vālin is mortally wounded. He dies reproaching Rāma, who justifies his action, and is cremated with elaborate ceremonial. Sugrīva is now installed as king.

The onset of the rains prevents any further search for Sītā but, after they are over, Hanumān and then Lakṣmaṇa remind Sugrīva of his promise to help. A vast army of Vānaras is mustered, divided into four, and sent off with instructions to search for Sītā in every direction. Rāma places most reliance on the party led by Hanumān and the heir apparent, Angada, and entrusts his ring to Hanumān as

a token for Sītā. Three of the parties are unsuccessful and return quite soon. Eventually, Angada and Hanumān's troop meet Sampati, Jaṭayus' brother, from whom they learn that Sītā is on the island of Laṅkā, and Hanumān resolves to leap over the sea to find her.

Book five, called the *Sundarakāṇḍa* presumably after its account of the beauties of Laṅkā, opens with a long account of Hanumān's fantastic leap and his wandering unnoticed through Laṅkā. Entering Rāvaṇa's magnificent palace, he searches in vain for Sītā, until eventually he discovers her in the *asoka* grove, and overhears her rebuff to Rāvaṇa's entreaties and threats. Hanumān gently reveals himself to the incredulous Sītā and establishes his identity by producing Rāma's ring. Sītā refuses to escape with Hanumān, preferring to be freed by Rāma in person, but she gives him a jewel as a token for Rāma. Instead of hurrying back secretly, Hanumān then embarks on a course of ostentatious and wanton destruction in Laṅkā and finally, curious to see Rāvaṇa, allows himself to be captured by Indrajit, Rāvaṇa's son. The angry Rāvaṇa is dissuaded from killing Hanumān outright by his virtuous brother Vibhīṣaṇa's reminder of the inviolability of envoys, so he merely sets fire to the Vānara's tail. This has the opposite of the desired effect, since Hanumān uses it as a brand to complete the destruction of Laṅkā. Reassuring himself about Sītā's safety, Hanumān crosses back over the sea and reports to his eager companions, before returning to Kiskindhā with the news of the success of their mission.

Book six, the *Yuddhakāṇḍa*, concerns the final battle between the armies of Rāma and Rāvaṇa. While Rāma and the Vānaras march southwards, the Rākṣasas prepare for war, but Vibhīṣaṇa defects when his conciliatory advice is refused. After some debate, he is welcomed into Rāma's camp and consecrated king of Laṅkā. The problem of how to cross the sea is solved by Nala's construction of a causeway. Rāvaṇa receives information from his spies about the size of the besieging army and after trying in vain to frighten Sītā into submission by showing her the illusion of Rāma's severed head, joins battle.

At first success favours Rāvaṇa, since Indrajit puts Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa out of action, but eventually the brothers are restored by the intervention of Garuḍa, the celestial bird. A long series of duels ensues, resulting in the eventual deaths of all the most fearsome Rākṣasa champions at the hands of Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa and the Vānara chiefs. During this time, Rāma overcomes Rāvaṇa but spares his life. As the tide of battle swings against the Rākṣasas, Kumbhakarṇa,

another of Rāvaṇa's brothers, is woken from his extended sleep but after causing initial havoc among the Vānaras even he is slain by Rāma. Indrajit repeatedly resorts to magic in order to strike terror into the Vānaras, culminating in preparations for a sacrifice to ensure victory, but he is prevented from completing it by Lakṣmaṇa, who eventually kills him. Only Rāvana is left and at last he takes the field again amid evil omens. His duel with Rāma is a protracted one but finally, after Rāma receives divine help in the form of Indra's chariot and charioteer, Rāvaṇa too is killed and Vibhīṣaṇa installed as king.

There is little trace now left of what was presumably the original simple happy ending of the story. In the version now extant, later qualms about Sītā's virtue cause Rāma to spurn her coldly, saying—for the first time—that he undertook the quest and combat simply to vindicate his own and his family's honour, and not for her sake. In desperation, Sītā proceeds to immolate herself on a pyre prepared by Lakṣmaṇa. However, the gods appear to Rāma and reveal that he is in fact an incarnation of Viṣṇu and Agni hands Sītā back to her delighted husband, unharmed and exonerated. Daśaratha too appears, blesses his sons and tells Rāma to return to Ayodhyā and resume his reign (the fourteen years of exile having at this point expired). Everyone on the victorious side climbs into Rāvana's aerial chariot and they fly back to Ayodhyā. Bharata is delighted by the news of Rāma's triumph and return, and restores the kingdom to him. This is followed by an elaborate ceremony of installation, and the epic is rounded off with a eulogy of Rāma and his righteous ten-thousand-year reign.

The seventh book is the *Uttarakāṇḍa*, or 'Further Exploits'. It is set in Ayodhyā after Rāma's victorious return but, despite its title, the first third of the book gives an account of Rāvaṇa's misdeeds before his encounter with Rāma, which Agastya narrates to Rāma. These include Rāvaṇa gaining from Brahmā by his austerities a boon of invincibility by all except mankind, his expelling Kubera from Laṅkā, and his rape of Rambhā (leading to the curse which prevents him raping Sītā). Agastya then finishes by narrating Hanumān's exploits. The remainder of the book deals with events subsequent to Rāma's installation. After his guests leave, Rāma lives happily with Sītā for some time and the country prospers under his rule, but slanderous gossip about Sītā's virtue while a prisoner of Rāvaṇa compels Rāma reluctantly to order her exile to Vālmīki's hermitage. Subsequently, Śatruघna happens to stay the night at Vālmīki's hermitage (while

on his way to defeat the Asura Lavaṇa and found the city of Madhurā) and learns of the birth of Rāma's twin sons, Kuśa and Lava. At a later date still, Rāma prepares a horse sacrifice, at which Kuśa and Lava are recognised by their singing of the Rāma story. Sītā is recalled and publicly re-affirms her purity by calling on the Earth to swallow her in testimony; the Earth embraces Sītā and disappears with her; Rāma is left to mourn her loss, using a golden statue of her as a substitute at sacrifices. After a long and prosperous reign, Rāma receives a visit from Time and this first leads to Lakṣmaṇa immolating himself in the river Sarayū. Next, after settling the kingdom on Kuśa and Lava, Rāma publicly immolates himself in the river Sarayū and, along with Bharata and Śatrughna, is welcomed by the gods.

CHAPTER TWO

THE HISTORY OF EPIC STUDIES

The biggest problem that any interpreter of the epics has to face is quite simply the scale of the works. As was noted in the first chapter, the *Mahābhārata* is generally accepted as the longest poem in the world at nearly 75,000 verses, while the *Rāmāyaṇa*, with a little under 20,000 stanzas in total, is still a substantial work. There has always, therefore, been a temptation to seek for some means to get a grip on the whole, a theory which will slot everything into place, before the evidence of the epics themselves has been properly assessed and interpreted; this has unfortunately been a recurrent feature of epic studies.

The history of epic studies (early period)

Portions of the *Mahābhārata* were being translated as early as the second half of the 18th century and editions and translations of parts of the *Rāmāyaṇa* were published from early in the 19th century, although serious research on the epics was slower to appear, starting from the middle of the 19th century. In the 19th century and the early part of the 20th century the main focus of Indological research tended to be the Vedic literature; although a number of significant studies on the epics were produced, the main tendency was to analyse the epics in order to separate older and younger layers. However, in the second half of the 20th century, prompted in part by the completion of the Critical Editions of the *Mahābhārata* in 1966 and of the *Rāmāyaṇa* in 1975, there has been a shift of interest more towards the epics, and also the Purāṇas, as well as a change in approach with greater emphasis on their mythic and religious elements. Indeed, in some respects, the *Mahābhārata* in particular has become a major focus of Indian studies, with a recognition of its importance for a better understanding of Hinduism and of Indian society.¹

¹ Among surveys of scholarship on the epics the more noteworthy are by Oscar Botto (1970), Alf Hiltebeitel (1979), and J. W. de Jong (1975, 1984 and 1985).

The first English translation of any part of the *Mahābhārata* was the translation, published in 1785, of the *Bhagavadgītā* by Charles Wilkins, an employee of the East India Company, whose ultimate ambition was to translate the entire work; indeed, in the autumn of 1784, when he presented the *Bhagavadgītā* translation to the Governor General of India, Warren Hastings, as a sample of the whole, he was said to have already completed more than a third of it. However, little more seems to have been published, apart from the Śakuntalā episode in 1794;² on the other hand, his *Bhagavadgītā* translation, which was the first scholarly translation of a Sanskrit text into any European language, was popular enough to be re-translated into French, German and Russian within a few years.³ In 1816, 1819 and 1824 the great scholar of comparative Indo-European linguistics Franz Bopp, who largely taught himself Sanskrit in Paris, edited the Sanskrit texts of the slaying of Hidimba, of the Nala episode, and then of Arjuna's journey to Indra's heaven,⁴ working entirely from manuscripts, but his planned survey of the contents of the whole work was never completed. At the same period A. W. von Schlegel, a leading figure in the German Romantic Movement, who was introduced to Sanskrit in Paris by the younger Bopp, produced an edition of the *Bhagavadgītā* with accompanying Latin translation.⁵ The first complete edition of the *Mahābhārata* was that edited by the pandits attached to the Education Committee and published in Calcutta between 1834 and 1839.⁶ The Bombay edition followed in 1862–63 and was accompanied by Nīlakanṭha's commentary.⁷

² *Bhagavadgītā* 1785; *Mahābhārata* 1794 and 1820. Wilkins also, according to van Buitenen (*Mahābhārata* 1973–78, vol. 1, xxxi), published a translation of the Churning of the Ocean from the first book; however, I have been unable to trace this. For some background to his *Bhagavadgītā* translation see Brockington 1989: 91–108.

³ The French translation by M. Parraud appeared just two years later, the Russian translation by A. A. Petrov a further year later and the German translation by F. Majer rather later (in 1802, with part having appeared in 1791).

⁴ The first appeared under the title 'Der Kampf mit dem Riesen' (in Bopp 1816, which also contained the translation of an extract from the *Rāmāyaṇa*, entitled 'Wiswamitras Büssungen'); see also *Mahābhārata* 1819 and 1824.

⁵ *Bhagavadgītā* 1823. This was printed with *devanāgarī* type brought from Paris and the text was based on the Calcutta 1808/09 edition and four Paris manuscripts.

⁶ *Mahābhārata* 1834–39. This edition included the *Harivamśa* and provided simply the plain text of the epic without any ancillaries such as notes; it also used a dual numbering system, one by verses only within each *parvan* (this is the system usually associated with this edition) and one by *adhyāyās*.

⁷ *Mahābhārata* 1862–63. This was produced in the traditional *pothī* format of loose oblong folios, with a drawing as frontispiece but no title-page in the usual Western style.

Although some remarks on the *Mahābhārata* were made by Sir William Jones, the founder of the Asiatic Society in Calcutta, in his researches at the end of the 18th century, the earliest systematic research was that of Christian Lassen, published from 1837 onwards and stimulated by the printing of the Calcutta edition and also by his collation of *Rāmāyana* manuscripts for von Schlegel.⁸ His main concern was to reconstruct Indian geography, ethnology and the pre-Buddhist history of India on the basis of the epic material, but he also examined its textual history and suggested that didactic and dogmatic passages were interpolations. Basically, his conclusions were that the poem as recited by Ugraśravas to Śaunaka should be considered the second of the three recensions of the poem alluded to in the *Anukramanikāparvan* (Mbh. 1.1.50 and 61, this second recension being also referred to in *Āśvalāyana Grhyasūtra* 111.4, which mentions a *Bhārata* alongside a *Mahābhārata*) and that, since Āśvalāyana can be dated to 350 B.C. and was a pupil of Śaunaka, this second recension should be dated to 460 or 400 B.C. Thereafter only interpolations with a Kṛṣṇa emphasis were added, whereas in its original form the epic is pre-Buddhist. Lassen also noted Kṛṣṇa's connections with both warrior and pastoral groups, suggesting that these reflected two layers of one tradition (with the pastoral one being the older), and argued that the name Vāsudeva was not in fact a patronymic but that the simple form Vasudeva meant 'Gott der Vasu'.⁹

Shortly afterwards H. H. Wilson, who had been the leader of the orientalist party in the debate over education in British India and was by then the first professor of Sanskrit at Oxford (and Librarian to the East India Company), contributed an introduction, which included a summary of contents of all the chapters of the *Mahābhārata*, to a volume of selections from the epic translated by F. Johnson.¹⁰ In 1846 the elder Adolf Holtzmann, as part of his publication of episodes from the *Mahābhārata*, put forward the views which were to be elaborated later by his nephew and to generate such argument and opposition in the second half of the 19th century (though accepted, for example, in part at least by Schroeder); he argued that the original form of the epic assigned right and virtue to Duryodhana's side and that it was later redactors, favouring the new deity Viṣṇu, who

⁸ Lassen 1837, 1839, 1840, 1842; also 1851, esp. 568–1034.

⁹ 1851: 764.

¹⁰ *Mahābhārata* 1842 (introduction reprinted in Wilson 1864).

revised the poem in order to exonerate the Pāṇḍavas and Kṛṣṇa from guilt for their misdeeds.¹¹

Albrecht Weber, who was primarily a Vedic scholar, from 1852 onwards looked for the origins of the epic in Vedic hymns of praise to heroes or patrons (*gāthā nārāśamsī, dānastuti*), arguing that from these later sprang longer epic songs, sung mainly on the occasion of great sacrificial feasts; he also believed that the *Mahābhārata* reflects a real battle between Aryan peoples. In a later publication (1891) he highlighted the central position of the *yajña* throughout the epic and stressed the Vedic antecedents underlying the epic view of the world. Weber also sought to establish a specific connection between the pastoral child god Kṛṣṇa and Christ. Besides the similarity of the birth story, where he showed that Kṛṣṇa's was a later addition to the Purānic narrative and so claimed that it was clearly borrowed from that of Christ, he argued that the *Śvetadvīpa* episode in the *Mahābhārata* was the Indian discovery of a form of worship of a personal deity peculiar to Christianity.¹² These findings were then publicised in India through *The Indian Antiquary* in the 1870s. It was here too that the English translation of the preface to Franz Lorinser's German translation of the *Bhagavadgītā* appeared. Lorinser quoted Lassen for the view, regarded by him as proved, that the *Bhagavadgītā* was composed in the 3rd century A.D. and affirmed that there was a 'strong infusion of ideas and sayings taken over from Christianity', juxtaposing passages from *Bhagavadgītā* and Gospels to make the point.¹³

In 1883 Søren Sørensen took the view that the *Mahābhārata* was originally a secular saga composed by a single author—since the unity of the main plot indicates this—onto which all other sections of the text were grafted at a later date; the original, therefore, as the creation of a single author lacked the contradictions, repetitions and digressions of the extant work; he therefore pruned its bulk to a core of under 8,000 stanzas in what was a drastic and essentially arbitrary procedure.¹⁴ Although the details of his argument have been largely disregarded, the main idea of an ancient warrior saga as the original

¹¹ Holtzmann 1846: vii–viii.

¹² Weber 1857: 69–124, ch. 3, 'Die Verbindung Indiens mit dem Ländern im Westen'; Weber 1867.

¹³ Lorinser 1873: 283; *Bhagavadgītā* 1869.

¹⁴ Sørensen 1883. Since he wrote in Danish, most scholars (including the present writer) have based what they know of the work on the Latin summary (pp. 355–383).

basis of the epic is still widely accepted. In fact, his other major work, the monumental index of names, has been of more lasting value for epic studies.¹⁵

Whereas Sörensen attempted to excise inconsistencies, a couple of years earlier the younger Adolf Holtzmann, inspired by his uncle's work, had used them as the basis of his 'inversion theory'.¹⁶ Arguing that the incoherence of the inner structure of the *Mahābhārata* reflected a difference of outlook between the older and the younger versions of the epic, he held that its origins lay in an early warrior epic and further argued, in his 'inversion theory' as Hopkins labelled it, that the Kauravas were originally the heroes, with Karṇa as the main protagonist of a work produced by a Buddhist author with Śaiva tendencies. Two later revisions, made by Vaiṣṇava brāhmans, completely changed its perspective by making the Pāṇḍavas the heroes but failed to eliminate all references to the bad qualities originally attributed to them. The first revision also turned Kṛṣṇa into the controlling deity and showed antagonism towards Śiva, whereas the second revision, made as late as 900 A.D., extended the narrative, added much didactic material and adopted a more conciliatory attitude towards Śiva. While his theory did highlight the problem of the trickery which Kṛṣṇa not infrequently advocates, it had few positive merits and involved a view of Indian religious history which was soon shown to be untenable. In any case, as the great Vedic scholar Hermann Oldenberg clearly showed, there are significant similarities between the epic conflict and the Vedic struggle between the Devas and the Asuras but no one suggests that instances of trickery by the gods mean that the Vedic poets originally sided with the Asuras.¹⁷

Not much later, and more cautiously, Weber endeavoured to trace the origins of the epic back into the Vedic literature and rightly stressed the importance of the *rājasūya* ritual. It does indeed seem to be true that sacrifice is one of the most important themes in the *Mahābhārata*.¹⁸ The epic opens with Janamejaya's snake sacrifice, which provides the setting for its narration; the action proper commences with the *rājasūya*, which is so fatefully interrupted by Yudhiṣṭhira's defeat at

¹⁵ Sörensen 1904–1925. More in the way of summary of contents was provided in a contemporary work by Jacobi (1903a).

¹⁶ Holtzmann 1881; cf. also Holtzmann 1892–95.

¹⁷ Oldenberg 1922: 36.

¹⁸ Weber 1891.

the dice-game; the main narrative is then concluded by the Aśvamedha, the other, even greater sacrifice of kingship; and two other major elements of the narrative are symbolically presented as sacrifices: the awesome sacrifice of battle and the slaughter of the *sauptika*, which is likened to the destruction of Dakṣa's sacrifice by Śiva.

One of Weber's pupils, Alfred Ludwig, from 1884 onwards also argued for a Vedic background to the epic.¹⁹ However, whereas the original form of the epic told of the capture of Kurukṣetra by the Bhāratas, the Pāṇḍavas were not historical and were in fact members of different tribes only later linked under the patronymic of Pāṇḍava. Since he thus considered that the purpose of the epic was not historical, Ludwig concluded that it must have another motive and therefore asserted that the main narrative was an allegory for a nature myth in which the changing seasons are symbolised by the changing fortunes of the protagonists (which was transformed into a heroic poem when the allegory was forgotten). In this seasonal myth, the sons of Pāṇḍu, the pale sun, fight against the son of the blind (powerless) winter sun, whose wife Gāndhārī covered her eyes (i.e. is wrapped in clouds); they are married to Kṛṣṇā, the dark one (i.e. the earth) and in the dice game lose everything until finally she is left with just one garment (i.e. the earth becomes bare in winter). Bhīma, the son of Vāyu, is the spring as the period of the equinoctial storms. Least convincingly of all, he speculated that Kṛṣṇa might represent the spring sun, blackened by the perpetual smoke of sacrificial fires. In a second article, he developed these theories further and also notes that the conflict ends with the night attack by Aśvatthāman (i.e. the last night-frost in spring) under the protection of Śiva whom, following Weber, he sees as the god of winter. However, to his credit, he was the first scholar to explore in any systematic fashion the inter-relationship of the two Sanskrit epics.²⁰

The absence of reliable evidence in favour of Holtzmann's view seems to have been one of the factors which prompted the Jesuit Joseph Dahlmann in 1895 to reject the view that the *Mahābhārata* consisted of an original saga and several later accretions and to assert the essential unity of the text, which he saw as the work of a single author who combined earlier myths, lawbooks and teachings into a single whole—broadly speaking the epic in its present form—as a

¹⁹ Ludwig 1884 and 1895.

²⁰ Ludwig 1894.

work of popular instruction.²¹ For Dahlmann the narrative symbolically represented the conflict between good and evil and was a means of enabling the population at large to understand the complex teachings of *dharmaśāstra*; thus both narrative and didactic portions belonged together as two means of expressing the same basic religious truths. However prolix the *Mahābhārata* is at times, he argued, the two elements of the narrative and the didactic were deliberately combined by a poet telling a dramatic story of the war between good and evil, an allegory rather than a historical account. Yudhiṣṭhīra as *dharmaṛāja* is not for him inconsistent in his actions but rather the principle that he represents is subtle and hard to fathom. Subsequently Sylvain Lévi adopted a similar approach to the *Bhagavadgītā*, seeing it with its religious and moral message as the central theme around which a poet had elaborated the epic narrative.²² Whatever the limitations of his own views, Dahlmann's work prompted a substantial number of studies on the *Mahābhārata*, with several of his contemporaries (Winternitz, Jacobi, Jolly and Cartellieri among them) arguing that neither his early date for the compilation of the epic nor the unity of the epic were acceptable, since many elements of the work obviously came from different periods.

The obvious deficiencies of these more synthetic theories in providing any real key to the complexities of the *Mahābhārata* helped to ensure a ready welcome for the analytic treatment of E. Washburn Hopkins, who forcefully rejected Dahlmann's ideas and argued convincingly for a more critical approach. Indeed, Hopkins first specifically examined the process of growth of the *Mahābhārata* in an article written in response to Dahlmann's book and substituting for a review of it; here he affirmed the relative lateness of the didactic portions and pointed out the lower proportions of variant readings in them by comparison with the battle books.²³ Hopkins brought to his epic studies his classical training—he held posts in Latin and Greek before his appointment to succeed Whitney at Yale—and an interest in cultural aspects, seen in his Leipzig thesis on the *varṇa* system in *Manu*, supervised by Windisch. This broader interest is seen in his earlier extensive article on the *ksatriya* class in ancient India, based mainly

²¹ Dahlmann 1895; cf. also Dahlmann 1899. One may note too the review by Auguste Barth (1897), and two articles by Winternitz (1897 and 1900).

²² Lévi 1917.

²³ Hopkins 1898a.

but not exclusively on the *Mahābhārata*, in which he examines their social position, kingship, weapons and military tactics, as well as the status of women; this already asserts the clear chronological distinction between narrative and didactic parts which is the hallmark of his views.²⁴

In his book, *The Great Epic of India*, which in a real sense marks the culmination and the conclusion of 19th-century scholarship on the epics, Hopkins proposed, on the basis of the disparities in language, metre and style between various parts of the epic, that it was a compilation consisting of several layers accreting around the small collection of lays which formed its core and which lacked the Pāṇḍavas as heroes or Kṛṣṇa as demi-god (both additions of the period around 400–200 B.C.). At the same time Hopkins highlighted the contrasting perspectives and teachings found in the *Mahābhārata*. His analysis of language and style marked an important advance, and his broad division of the *Mahābhārata* into narrative and later didactic elements and the general mechanisms of growth he postulated gained wide acceptance through their inherent plausibility. Hopkins accepted, however, that the material was so tightly interwoven that any attempt at separation into early and late parts would be virtually impossible and that, despite the impressive evidence he had collected, adherence to the synthetic approach had not been rendered impossible, merely illogical.²⁵ In the absence of better texts than those then available, further progress was difficult and interest in the *Mahābhārata* waned for some time. However, Hopkins himself subsequently published a useful volume on *Epic Mythology* which summarised with relatively little theorising the data on the mythology and the deities of both epics, the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*.²⁶

Editions of the *Rāmāyaṇa* were undertaken much earlier than for the *Mahābhārata*. The first text and translation began to appear early in the 19th century, undertaken by the Serampore Baptist missionaries, William Carey and Joshua Marshman, with the aid of a grant from the Asiatic Society. Three volumes appeared between 1806 and 1810.²⁷ This represents remarkable progress, when account is taken of the

²⁴ Hopkins 1889a.

²⁵ Hopkins 1901a (2nd edn.), see especially pp. 400–402.

²⁶ Hopkins 1915.

²⁷ *Rāmāyaṇa* 1806–10. The translation only of the *Bālakānda* was reprinted in England in 1808.

small amount of time that Carey, who had the main hand in it, was able to devote to the task. It is commonly stated that nothing further appeared and that the fire which destroyed the Serampore printing works in 1812 had consumed both the text being printed and the manuscript of further parts. However, at least one copy of a substantial part of the fourth volume has survived and is in the Indian Institute Library in Oxford.²⁸ The text which Carey and Marshman printed was not that of the Bengali recension but was basically that of the Tilaka commentary; however, it does contain occasional readings attributed in the Critical Edition only to Bengali or Maithili manuscripts. Another interesting feature of the text is the regular use of a subscript dot to indicate word division when this is not apparent because of *sandhi*; the same practice is found occasionally in manuscripts, where no doubt such punctuation was similarly added for the guidance of Europeans. The translation is not particularly literary, endeavouring to be as literal as is practical, while the editors seem in many instances to have been indebted to *pandits* for the information given in the explanatory notes.

This was followed before the middle of the century by A. W. von Schlegel's incomplete but critically edited text (using 12 manuscripts, the collation of which was done jointly with Lassen, and with a Latin translation of part) and by Gaspare Gorresio's edition of the Bengali recension based on manuscripts from Paris and London.²⁹ Schlegel planned to edit the *Rāmāyaṇa* in eight volumes but only managed to produce the text of the *Bāla* and *Ayodhyā kāṇḍas*; however, he did firmly establish the existence of the Bengal (i.e. Northeastern) and Southern recensions. Gorresio's edition was based on the Bengal recension and was made from manuscripts located in Paris and London. Translations of extracts also appeared at this period, most notably of the death of Yajñadatta from the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa*, first translated into French by Antoine Chézy, which appeared in several varying editions and was in turn translated into English.³⁰ Gorresio's edition prompted several verse translations of selected episodes into Italian,

²⁸ This lacks a title page but the first page is headed: 'The Ramayana. Uranyakandu. Book III. Section 1'; it contains the first sixty-four sargas of the *Aranyakāṇḍa* in its numeration, with the first verse corresponding to 2.108.1 of the Critical Edition and the last page containing four *ślokas* of its sarga 64, corresponding to 3.51.1–3 (including 1011* and 5ab). I am most grateful to my wife, Mary Brockington, for locating this volume and for these details of its contents. Some further details are contained in Brockington 1994.

²⁹ *Rāmāyaṇa* 1829–38; *Rāmāyaṇa* 1843–50.

³⁰ *Rāmāyaṇa* 1814, 1826, and 1820.

some of them in rivalry of his achievement as much as in dependence on it.³¹ Adolf Holtzmann senior, better known for his controversial work on the *Mahābhārata*, also translated some extracts from the *Ayodhyākānda*.³² Research then followed from the middle of the century.

Views about the *Rāmāyaṇa* at that period were almost as varied as those about the *Mahābhārata* but the conjectures put forward have in large part been refuted by the results of more recent studies. Opinions advanced include: influence from the poems of Homer (a view advanced by Weber and rebutted by Kashinath Trimbak Telang); its interpretation by Victor Henry as an allegorical narration of a solar myth; its presentation by Lassen as an allegorical representation of the Aryans' first attempt to conquer South India, or even the struggle of the Buddhists of Ceylon overwhelmed by brāhmans (James Talboys-Wheeler); and Jacobi's view of it as a transposition of Vedic mythology about Indra.³³ The first major research, as early as 1850, was in fact a sober study of the Śunahṣepa legend by the Vedic scholar and lexicographer Rudolph von Roth, who dealt with the legend first in the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* and then in various other texts, including both the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Harivamśa*; he points out that the legend does not occur in the *Mahābhārata* and shows that the *Rāmāyaṇa* version is quite different from the older *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* version, while the versions of the *Harivamśa*, *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* and *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* seem to derive from the *Rāmāyaṇa*.

Weber, enlarging his scope from his *Mahābhārata* studies, began by assessing the relationship of the *Rāmāyaṇa* to the newly available Jātaka literature and accepting the priority of the *Dasaratha Jātaka* version, which led him to regard the abduction of Sītā and the expedition to Lankā as separate elements.³⁴ In looking for a source for these, he favoured borrowing from Homer, noting mention of Yavanas and of the zodiac as further evidence for dating the epic. He also suggests an allegorical interpretation of the epic, with Rāma symbolising the moon, the exile winter, Sītā as the furrow and her love as the attraction of the furrow for the light of the moon. The issue of a possible relationship with Homer has continued to fascinate scholars. Arthur Lillie in 1912 argued that Homer drew the stories of the Iliad and

³¹ For details see Della Casa 1993–94.

³² *Rāmāyaṇa* 1841 and 1843.

³³ Weber 1870; Telang 1873; Henry 1904: 162–67; Lassen 1866–74: I, 647–48 and II, 501–06; Talboys-Wheeler 1869; Jacobi 1893: 130–39.

³⁴ Weber 1870: 7, 14, 20–21.

the Odyssey from the *Rāmāyaṇa*, while for good measure his final chapter presents Śiva as a form of the Semitic Baal. Wilhelm Printz in 1926 sensibly surveyed the stories of Helen and Sītā and asserted that any parallels are instances of convergence in development. Wolfgang Pax in 1936 compared the rape of Sītā with, for example, Helen and Ariadne and interpreted the *Rāmāyaṇa* as an elaboration of an ancient Indo-Aryan sun and vegetation myth. Other epic traditions have also been brought in: Isaiah Sundaram Peter makes comparisons between *Beowulf* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*, and more recently Marijan Molé draws parallels between the *Rāmāyaṇa* (mostly the *Bāla-kāṇḍa*) and the *Shāh Nāmah*.³⁵

In the last quarter of the 19th century, as in some sense an out-growth from his work on the Petersburg Dictionary, Otto von Böhlingk contributed several careful philological articles which still retain their value.³⁶ At the same period Charles Schoebel pointed to the religious significance of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, regarding it as having a universal morality at its core and acknowledging the humanity of Rāma's portrayal.³⁷ Hermann Jacobi is best known for his work on Prakrit and Jainism but from the 1890s also took an interest in the epics. Jacobi's main contribution to epic studies was his volume on the *Rāmāyaṇa* but he also made significant contributions concerning the *Mahābhārata* and in particular metrics. Jacobi also rebutted the view advocated by Auguste Barth and George Grierson that the *Rāmāyaṇa* had originally been composed in Prakrit and only later translated into Sanskrit, doing so by a careful examination of both the language and the metre of both epics.³⁸ For Jacobi Rāma's battle with Rāvaṇa is another form of Indra's battle with Vṛtra; his argument is that, since in later Vedic literature Sītā is the wife of Indra or Parjanya, Rāma must be a form of these gods.³⁹ Here again we see the attempt to link the epics back to the Vedic literature, which is perhaps inevitable with regard to their position in the literary history, though posing certain problems. In terms also of the religious pattern visible in both epics—or at any rate in their older parts—it makes a

³⁵ Peter 1934; Molé 1960.

³⁶ von Böhlingk 1875, 1887 and 1889.

³⁷ Schoebel 1888.

³⁸ Jacobi 1894.

³⁹ Subsequently and rather inadequately Wolfgang Pax (1936) rejected Jacobi's view of Rāma as a transposition of Indra in favour of European parallels, seeing the *Rāmāyaṇa* as an elaboration of an old Indo-Aryan sun and vegetation myth.

lot of sense to link them with the Vedic literature. The last decade of the 19th century also saw the publication of Hans Wirtz's careful study of the Western (now usually called Northwestern) Recension and the innovative survey by Alexander Baumgartner, a Jesuit scholar of world literature, of the *Rāmāyaṇa* and its various adaptations in India through to Tulsīdās and other vernacular versions, as well as the discussion by Nobin Chandra Das of the geographical data contained in the *Rāmāyaṇa*; all of these were the first examples of trends which were to be developed in subsequent research.⁴⁰

After the appearance of Hopkins's *The Great Epic* in 1901, there was a decline in interest in the epics during the first half of the 20th century, with little of really major significance published. Nevertheless, a few items deserve mention here, while some other, more specific studies will be referred to in subsequent chapters. F. E. Pargiter used the *Mahābhārata* to buttress his theory—deriving from his study of Purāṇic genealogies—of conflict between brāhmans and *kṣatriyas*, arguing that the great war marked the triumph of the Kṛṣṇa-worshipping Pañcālas over the side of Brahmanism (the Kauravas and their allies) and the resulting entry of non-Vedic elements into the orthodox tradition; his views were supported by Grierson but strongly opposed by A. B. Keith.⁴¹

J. Kennedy distinguished several Kṛṣṇas: one is the hero of many solar myths, the slayer of demons, who is connected with the dark sun and the storms of the rainy season and whose city of Dvārakā is located ‘where the sun dips into the boundless Western ocean’, and another is ‘the original Kṛṣṇa of the Indus Valley, non-Aryan hero and semi-Aryan god, Aryan only in name’.⁴² He further argued that the child Kṛṣṇa originated from the bringing into the Mathurā area of Christian legends from the apocryphal gospels by the Scythian Gurjaras and in a later article assigns this child Kṛṣṇa to the Gupta period.⁴³ He traced the possible route for the borrowing in considerable detail but failed to convince even his contemporaries.

Oldenberg, though drawing on the works of Jacobi and Hopkins, put forward in a posthumously published work an individual view of

⁴⁰ Wirtz 1894; Baumgartner 1894; Das 1896.

⁴¹ Pargiter 1908; Grierson 1908b; Keith 1908b.

⁴² Kennedy 1907 and 1908.

⁴³ Kennedy 1917.

the origin and nature of the *Mahābhārata*.⁴⁴ He stressed the links of Parikṣit and Janamejaya with late Vedic literature and assessed the roles of *kuśilava*, *sūta* and brāhmaṇa in its narration, before developing his view that the *Mahābhārata* originated in a work in mixed prose and verse which was later reworked into a more regular verse structure. His work was more soundly based than some, since he viewed the epic as literature and examined in detail several passages, as well as surveying grammatical usages, the different metres employed by later redactors and the style of the work. He suggested that its narrative is based on events which happened at the end of the R̥gvedic period around 1200 B.C.

Gerrit Jan Held pointed out that the debates between synthetically and critically oriented scholars had produced more confusion than clarity, suggesting that neither approach was properly ‘scientific’ but dependent on subjective theorising.⁴⁵ He adopted an ethnographic or anthropological approach (which in practice meant defending the organic unity of the epic against the analysts), basing his ideas on those of Durkheim and Mauss and seeing the epic as structured around a potlatch ritual, such as occurs in various cultures; indeed, the greater part of his book presents these theories in general terms, which are more specifically applied to the *Mahābhārata* in the final chapter. Held argued that the Kauravas and Pāñḍavas were analogous to two phratries in a tribe, which were therefore in a permanent state of co-operation and rivalry, and that both dicing and warfare were part of potlatch competitiveness. The whole story hinges on the fateful *dyūta*, gambling tournament, in which Yudhiṣṭhīra plays dice with the Kauravas and loses his property, his kingdom and his wife Draupadī. The place where the tournament was played, the consecrated arena, was the *dyūtamāṇḍala*, a gaming circle; it was drawn with great care according to precise rules of orientation. A special hall was built for the game, fenced off and consecrated, and the players were not allowed to leave the ring until they had discharged all their obligations. The fateful game of dice, Held argued, was the climax to a feast which included a variety of agonistic contests and exchange of gifts. Yudhiṣṭhīra accepted the challenge of the *dyūta* not as a personal whim but because he was the *dharma-rāja*, the personification of the moral order; it is clear therefore, that the gambling tournament was a sacred

⁴⁴ Oldenberg 1922.

⁴⁵ Held 1935.

obligation because, in Held's view, the *dyūta* was the traditional means to ensure the constant circulation of tribal wealth.

Held compared the way in which the Devas and Asuras are in conflict but co-operate in the ritual of the churning of the ocean, suggesting that Viṣṇu and Śiva are similarly complementary to each other (with Kṛṣṇa on the side of the Pāṇḍavas and Śiva on the side of the Kauravas). He also attempted to detect an elaborate scheme of initiatory relationships in the epic (between Kṛṣṇa and Kamsa, between Arjuna-Nara and Kṛṣṇa-Śrīrāyaṇa, between Arjuna and Śiva, and between Mārkandeya and Kṛṣṇa as child) and affirmed that the didactic and epic elements belong together, since teaching is integral to the process of initiation, and were not artificially brought together. The unity still visible in the epic is the unity of the society with which it is genetically connected (which Held thought was probably that found in the period of the Brāhmaṇas). This last point—that the epic must be understood in terms of the society and culture which produced it—was at the time and remains one that deserves emphasising.⁴⁶

Two other studies from a broadly ethnographic approach also belong here, in the period before the impact of the Critical Editions, since they too, like Held's book, were published before the *Mahābhārata* Critical Edition had progressed far enough for their authors to utilise it. One is Walter Ruben's volume on Kṛṣṇa and the other Charles Autran's more general study.⁴⁷ Ruben, a former pupil of Jacobi, is mainly concerned with the reconstruction of the oldest and most original version of the Kṛṣṇa legend and he assumes that the kernel of the traditions about Kṛṣṇa and the Pāṇḍavas is historical but that it was mythicised on the model of the war between the Devas and the Asuras. In particular, he considers that the story of Kṛṣṇa's conflict with Jarāśamda of Magadha must have a historical basis, since Kṛṣṇa's humiliation in it is hardly likely to have been invented. However, such historical roots are only part of the story and Ruben goes on to postulate three layers in the growth of the tradition from independent

⁴⁶ Among his clearest statements of it is the following (p. 114): 'It is mythic material that we have before us in the Epic, hence we must try to reconstruct from it the conception of the universe peculiar to the epic period. There being, as we have already said, no illimitable gulf fixed between the sacred world of myth and the profane world, we are able by study of the mythic material at our disposal to acquire at the same time a certain insight into the organization of human society as it really existed in the period of the Epic.'

⁴⁷ Ruben 1941b; Autran 1946. Other publications by Ruben bearing more on the *Harivamśa* will be mentioned in chapter 5.

cycles of legend (following in this Oldenberg and others but taking it much further): firstly the Mathurā cycle in which various local or folk elements accrete around the conflicts with Kāṁsa and Jarāśaṁdha, secondly the Dvārakā material based on Kṛṣṇa's flight there from Mathurā (perhaps originally about a different hero), and finally a fusion of these two with the Hāstīnapura material, again expanded with folk narrative (which, with its 'pre-moral' ethics helps to explain some of the ruses suggested by Kṛṣṇa that later standards have seen as questionable). The implication of this is that the *Mahābhārata* originally lacked the figure of Kṛṣṇa and Ruben suggests that the *Mahābhārata* strains our credulity in presenting a hero who does not stay where the action is and eleven times has to hurry from Dvārakā to the aid of the Pāṇḍavas, and even when present is commonly a spectator; Ruben argues vigorously that Kṛṣṇa is inessential to the basic plot of the *Mahābhārata*, which is the war and the events leading up to it.⁴⁸ While two of the episodes isolated by Ruben have been removed from the text of the Critical Edition (Draupadi's appeal to Kṛṣṇa at her disrobing and his helping her to feed Durvāsas and his companions), the bulk of the material is shown to have full manuscript support, so Ruben's Kṛṣṇa-less *Mahābhārata* would have to be pushed to a stage before the archetype.

Autran adopts a more obviously ethnographic approach and, while disclaiming any particular theory, uses a comparative approach, especially with the Greek world. The oldest stratum of the epic is related to the pre-Vedic 'point d'eau', seen as a centre of Asian culture in general. This leads to consideration of *tīrthas*, *nāgas* and *yakṣas* successively and these are seen collectively as the source of luxuriating legends, although he dismisses their roles in the *Mahābhārata* narrative as being of subsidiary interest. He holds that the Pāṇḍavas' polyandry links them with the pervasive Himalayan and Nepalese *tīrtha* and *nāga* cults. The weaknesses of an anthropology that is not sufficiently based on study of the texts themselves are evident in his treatment, as also in some more recent ethnographic approaches.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Ruben's views on this point have attracted an equally vigorous rebuttal by Hiltebeitel (1979: 87–92); cf. also Hiltebeitel 1976b: 79–101.

⁴⁹ As a tailpiece to these ethnographic studies, which become increasingly less rewarding, may be mentioned Robert Shafer (1954). Shafer cheerfully admits that his title is inaccurate, since his book is about the *Mahābhārata*, and begins his study with the words: 'The Great Epic of India is essentially the story of native rebellion against Aryan exploitation.' He sees the background to the war in the narratives of

The Critical Editions

By the end of the 19th century the desirability of a critical edition of the *Mahābhārata* had already been recognised by Moriz Winternitz, who first raised the question at the XIth International Congress of Orientalists at Paris in 1897, at the end of his paper ‘On the South-Indian Recension of the *Mahābhārata*’, and laid his ‘Proposal for the Foundation of a Sanskrit Epic Text Society’ (similar to the already well established Pali Text Society) before the XIIth International Congress at Rome in 1899, raising the matter again in his paper on the *Sabhāparvan* in the South Indian Recension of the *Mahābhārata*, read at the XIIIth Congress at Hamburg in 1902.⁵⁰ Winternitz was Librarian of the Indian Institute, Oxford, at the date of the first paper and, while working on manuscripts in Oxford, had come to realise the value of the Southern manuscripts for the text of the *Mahābhārata*. Winternitz records that at first the idea of a critical edition of the *Mahābhārata* met with great scepticism, since most scholars considered that it would be impossible to restore a critical text of the Great Epic. A committee was nonetheless appointed at the Rome Congress to consider his proposal but it suggested that the ‘International Association of Academies’ should take on the task. At the London meeting of the Association of Academies in 1904 it was decided to make such a critical edition one of the tasks to be undertaken under its auspices.

Despite various doubts and hesitations, the Academies of Berlin, Vienna and Göttingen did set aside some funds for the purpose and a sample fascicule was prepared by Heinrich Lüders, who had followed Winternitz as Librarian of the Indian Institute and also published a study of the Grantha recension.⁵¹ This specimen was prepared on the basis of 29 manuscripts held in European libraries and was laid before the Indian Section of the Congress of Orientalists at Copenhagen in

how Yudhiṣṭhīra’s four brothers set out to conquer all the other nations and tribes of India and of the tribute that these offer in the *Dīgijaya* and *Dyūta parvans* respectively. Most of the book is then taken up with a simplistic attempt to plot the location of all states and tribes mentioned.

⁵⁰ A sketch of the moves towards a critical edition will be found in Sukthankar’s ‘Prolegomena’ to *The Ādīparvan, being the first book of the Mahābhārata* (*Mahābhārata* 1933–66: i–ii); see also Winternitz 1901 and 1929, and Utgikar 1921. At this period Winter-nitz also published an article (1898a) which examines two *Mahābhārata* manuscripts in Grantha script in the Whish collection, as well as mentioning others in that collection.

⁵¹ Lüders 1901a.

1908.⁵² Apart from this specimen (*Druckprobe*) nothing more was printed, but some preliminary work, such as the classifying and collating of manuscripts, was done by Lüders and some of his pupils, by Winternitz, Geiger and Otto Stein. In addition, steps were taken to raise the necessary funds, and a sum of £6000 was collected before the outbreak of the First World War brought all activity to a halt.

Then in 1918 the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute at Poona (founded only the previous year) resolved to undertake the task and work actually commenced in April 1919. The first steps were the collation of some fourteen manuscripts of the *Sabhāparvan*, then collation of eleven manuscripts 'of the Nāgarī and the Devanāgarī groups' of the *Virāṭaparvan*, followed by the first two *adhyāyas* of the *Ādiparvan*. The first visible outcome was a tentative edition of the *Virāṭaparvan* (based additionally on a few Bengali, Grantha and Telugu script manuscripts, to a total of sixteen) edited by N. B. Utgikar and published in 1923.⁵³ In fact, Utgikar relied mainly on three Devanāgarī manuscripts (later to be used as D1–3 in the Critical Edition), which divided the book into 67 *adhyāyas*, the number given in the *Parvasamgraha* (Utgikar believed that this figure was correct). This edition, though based on insufficient manuscript material, nonetheless showed what could be achieved by a full critical edition; in many cases Utgikar provided a better text than the Vulgate and many verses and some *adhyāyas*, for example the *Durgastotra*, were already shown to lack general manuscript support.

In August 1925 the project came under the direction of V. S. Sukthankar, a former pupil of Winternitz whose text-critical methods he adopted, and in due course the Critical Edition proper of the *Mahābhārata* was published in 19 volumes at Poona from 1927 to 1966, compiled on the basis of a large number of manuscripts, and it was followed by the *Hariwāṇśa* and six volumes of *pāda*-index. All but one of the books was edited by an Indian scholar; the *Sabhāparvan* was edited by Franklin Edgerton, although Sukthankar had earlier tried to persuade Winternitz to edit that volume and Lüders to edit the *Karmaparvan*. This edition has undoubtedly been one of the most significant events in Indology in the 20th century, as well as a matter of legitimate pride for Indian scholars, on which they did not hesitate

⁵² *Mahābhārata* 1908. Subsequently, in 1928, the collations made were forwarded to the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute.

⁵³ *Mahābhārata* 1923.

to capitalise. For example, S. K. Belvalkar records in connection with his editing of that part of the *Sāntiparvan* ‘concerning the origin and functions of the State’, which the text ‘requires every person, called upon to discharge the functions of the Head of the State, to carefully study’, that ‘Hence I thought that it would be opportune and quite in the fitness of things to request Shri Jawaharlal Nehru to secure from the Government of India a special grant towards the printing expenses of the Parvan in question. The grant was kindly promised and paid up in three instalments, and the editorial work on the Rajadharma section of the *Sāntiparvan* was straightway commenced on the 15th of August, 1947, and the first forme of the final edition was actually printed on the 15th of August, 1948, the first anniversary of the achievement of India’s Independence’.⁵⁴

In his Prolegomena to the first volume Sukthankar declared that the aim of the Critical Edition was to reconstruct ‘the oldest form of the text which it is possible to establish on the basis of the manuscript material available’ (p. lxxxvi). To this end, a large number of manuscripts were collated (using Nīlakanṭha’s texts as the vulgate),⁵⁵ as well as several printed editions, and the result has been the collecting together of a far more complete record of the variant readings and the regional traditions of the epic than was in practice available to any scholar previously.⁵⁶ The manuscripts were classified firstly into the Northern and Southern recension and then, on the basis of the scripts used, into versions. Sukthankar argued (p. vii) that ‘This *principium divisionis* is not as arbitrary as it might at first appear. The superficial difference of scripts corresponds, as a matter of fact, to deep underlying textual differences. It is common experience in India that when we have a work handed down in different versions, the script is invariably characteristic of the version.’ He does then go on

⁵⁴ *Mahābhārata* 1933–66: vol. XVI, *The Sāntiparvan*, ed. by S. K. Belvalkar, Introduction, CC–CCI.

⁵⁵ R. N. Dandekar (1962) notes that 1,259 manuscripts were examined and 734 actually used; the actual number used for any one *parvan* was usually around forty to fifty. After the end of the main project, the Institute reckoned that ‘as many as 1,259 manuscripts written in as many as twelve different scripts have been critically examined’ (Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Poona, 1917–67, Golden Jubilee Souvenir, May 17, 1968, p. 4).

⁵⁶ Besides Sukthankar’s own remarks, Dandekar (1962) describes the methods and aims adopted in the preparation of the Critical Edition of the *Mahābhārata*: collection and collation of manuscripts, the distinction of recensions, the use of testimonia, preference of the *lectio difficilior* and *textus simplicior* in order to present ‘a text of the Epic as old as the extant manuscript material permitted.’

to state that in practice matters are never as clearcut as this and, for example, Utgikar demonstrated the extent of internal variation within the Devanāgarī tradition by an examination of the manuscripts used for the beginning of the *Sabhāparvan*.⁵⁷ Nevertheless, the division into version by script tended to be accepted without any serious qualification by subsequent editors.

The main basis for inclusion in the text was defined as ideally occurrence in both recensions, which means that the Critical Edition is on the whole closer to the Northern Recension, since the Southern Recension is appreciably longer. Where variants occurred, the principle adopted was to choose the reading found in the largest number of apparently independent versions, with a preference for manuscripts originating in Kashmir (whether in Śāradā script or transcripts into Devanāgarī), since these were held to have preserved a particularly conservative text and were grouped as the North-western Group within the Northern Recension, while the Nepālī, Maithilī, Bengali and non-Kashmiri Devanāgarī manuscripts formed the so-called Central Group (with the Nepālī, Maithilī and Bengali manuscripts constituting an Eastern sub-group). The composite character of the Devanāgarī version is obvious. Within the Southern Recension the Telugu and Grantha manuscripts were grouped together as containing a large number of corruptions and secondary additions from which the Malayalam manuscripts are free. Sukthankar was well aware that it was not possible to construct anything like the *stemma codicum* familiar from classical studies and warned against an unthinking application of such techniques to the *Mahābhārata*. However, he felt—and, for example, Edgerton in editing the *Sabhāparvan* concurred—that all manuscripts of the *Mahābhārata* basically derive from a single written text (although inconsistencies in this text establish clearly that this was a conflation of existing versions) and that the Critical Edition is the closest approximation to this archetype that we can achieve, although the complexity of the text's transmission is such that many uncertainties of detail remain. Even if this claim is not accepted, it must be conceded that the text of the Critical Edition has removed many of the obvious accretions found in other editions.

Extensive though the examination of manuscripts was, it by no means exhausted the total of *Mahābhārata* manuscripts known to exist and did not even cover all of the regional scripts—as Sukthankar

⁵⁷ Utgikar 1918–1921.

himself pointed out, no manuscripts in Kannada, Orīya and Nandi-nāgarī scripts were used.⁵⁸ Besides a spread of manuscripts in different scripts, another criterion for selection was their age and Sukthankar affirmed that ‘Old manuscripts, even though fragmentary and partly illegible, were selected in preference to modern-looking manuscripts, though complete, neatly written and well preserved.’⁵⁹ This admirable principle was perhaps not always entirely adhered to. The oldest dated manuscript used for the *Ādiparvan* contains the date Nepālī samvat 632, corresponding to A.D. 1511 (ms. N3), while the only Maithilī ms. for that book is dated La. Sam. 411, corresponding to A.D. 1528. These illustrate well how recent in terms of the transmission of the text is even the earliest manuscript evidence.

One result of the compilation of the Critical Edition was to reduce the length of the text from its traditional length of a hundred thousand verses (which probably included the *Harivamśa*) to a little under three quarters of that total—to be precise 73,650 verses and 297 prose units in 1,995 *adhyāyas* (the average length of an *adhyāya* thus being 37 verses). Since in the next three chapters details of frequency will be given on occasion, it will be useful to provide here a list of the lengths of the various *parvans* in both *adhyāyas* and verses (as well as the average length of the *adhyāyas* in that *parvan*).

Ādiparvan contains 7196 verses and 156 prose units in 225 *adhyāyas* (average: 32),

Sabhāparvan contains 2390 verses in 72 *adhyāyas* (average 33),

Āranyakaparvan contains 10141 verses and 84 prose units in 299 *adhyāyas* (average 34),

Virātaparvan contains 1834 verses in 67 *adhyāyas* (average 27),

Udyogaparvan contains 6063 verses in 197 *adhyāyas* (average 31),

Bhīṣmaparvan contains 5406 verses in 117 *adhyāyas* (average 46),

Dronaparvan contains 8112 verses in 173 *adhyāyas* (average 47),

Karṇaparvan contains 3871 verses in 69 *adhyāyas* (average 56),

Śalyaparvan contains 3293 verses in 64 *adhyāyas* (average 51),

Sauptikaparvan contains 772 verses in 18 *adhyāyas* (average 43),

Strīparvan contains 730 verses in 27 *adhyāyas* (average 27),

Śāntiparvan has 12890 verses + 57 prose units in 353 *adhyāyas* (average 36), within which

Rājadharmaparvan contains 4512 verses in 128 *adhyāyas* (average 35),

⁵⁸ *Mahābhārata* 1933–66: I, vi; cf. also Dunham 1985.

⁵⁹ *Mahābhārata* 1933–66: I, vi, repeated almost verbatim in Dandekar 1962: 304.

Āpaddharmaṇiparvan contains 1560 verses in 39 *adhyāyas* (average 40), and

Mokṣadharmaṇiparvan has 6737 verses and 57 prose units in 186 *adhyāyas* (average 36),

Anuśāsanaparvan contains 6536 verses in 154 *adhyāyas* (average 42),

Āśvamedhikaparvan contains 2862 verses in 96 *adhyāyas* (average 30),

Āśramavāsikaparvan contains 1062 verses in 47 *adhyāyas* (average 23),

Mausalaparvan contains 273 verses in 9 *adhyāyas* (average 30),

Mahāprasthānikaparvan contains 106 verses in 3 *adhyāyas* (average 35), and

Svargārohaṇaparvan contains 194 verses in 5 *adhyāyas* (average 39).⁶⁰

Sukthankar was not only the General Editor of the Critical Edition but also published a book on the *Mahābhārata*, in which he moves on from the text-critical approach to a more holistic appreciation of its narrative and meaning, distinguishing three levels of meaning: a ‘mundane’, an ‘ethical’ and a ‘metaphysical’.⁶¹ He decries the search for the nucleus of the text, rightly claiming that most previous efforts had not had a basis in the work itself or in the Indian tradition, and he seeks instead for its ‘inner meaning’; thus, the physical battle is really a battle of good against evil, of Devas against Asuras, which at the same time symbolises the struggle for supremacy of our nobler mental faculties. At the ‘mundane’ or empirical level of interpretation, he suggests, the epic poets were like the ancient *r̄sis* in being interested in the unravelling of issues of personality, which takes on the dimensions of the quest for *mokṣa* and involves insight into *karma*; however, when he himself applies this it turns into some rather amateur psychoanalysis. At the ethical level, not only the conflict between *dharma* and *adharma* but also the doctrine of *avatāras* is covered, and Sukthankar suggests that the rivalry of the Devas and Asuras is continued in that between the Pāṇḍavas and the Kurus, in the process tending to allegorise its message. At the metaphysical level, he urges that the epic’s

⁶⁰ The majority of these figures have been taken from the introductions to the relevant *parvans* but those for the *Ādi*, *Āranyaka*, *Strī*, *Rājadharmā*, *Āpaddharma* and *Mokṣadharma* *parvans* have been calculated by Mary Brockington (and the total thus produced for the *Śāntiparvan* substituted for that of 12892 given in the introduction to that book). These figures are for the verses as numbered (with *ślokas* of six *pādās* counted therefore as one verse) and the average lengths of the *adhyāyas* have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

⁶¹ Sukthankar 1957.

thematic ties to the Upaniṣads must be recognised, pointing for example to the use of the symbolism of the chariot as the vehicle of the soul in the Upaniṣads and in the *Bhagavadgītā*, and he affirms that Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna symbolise the Paramātman and the *jīvātman* respectively, as in the Upaniṣadic motif of the two birds on one bough (as well as terming the *Bhagavadgītā* ‘the heart’s heart of the Mahābhārata’).⁶² As with so many of the approaches to the text, while it does bring to light certain features, it fails to take sufficient account of its great diversity. Another interesting approach to the meaning of the epic by an Indian scholar comprises a series of interpretative studies by the anthropologist Irawati Karve, centring round important characters whose personalities and motives are analysed and assessed against the background of *kṣatriya* codes of behaviour.⁶³

Sukthankar also made a significant advance in his identification of the Bhārgava influence on the expansion of the *Mahābhārata*, to be discussed more fully at the end of the third chapter. That and the contemporary publication of Held’s ethnographical study mark the beginning of a revival of interest in the epics, which only fully got under way, however, rather more recently, after the Critical Edition itself had had time to make an impact. One result of its publication has been to spark off a long and vigorous debate about the principles behind the production of a critical edition and indeed whether such an exercise is valid for a text of the character of the *Mahābhārata*. In particular, a dissenting view has been voiced by Madeleine Biardeau, who concludes that the methods of European textual criticism merely produce new recensions and that therefore a comprehensive text such as Nilakanṭha’s is more valuable.⁶⁴ She regards the fluidity of oral tradition as well established and so considers the production of another edition as more artificial than any based on a specific manuscript recension, arguing that even if there was a common source, it was bound to change in recitation and thus there was never a single recension.

Another result of the publication of the Critical Edition has been to prompt new translations of the *Mahābhārata* into European languages, the first into Russian and the best known that into English started by J. A. B. van Buitenen, neither of which is yet complete.

⁶² Sukthankar 1957: 119.

⁶³ Karve 1969.

⁶⁴ Biardeau 1968b and 1970.

The latter in particular has already played a major role in presenting the *Mahābhārata* to a wider audience and so extending the circles in which it is appreciated. Before his death, van Buitenen had published three volumes, containing the first five books, and his translation of the *Bhagavadgītāparvan* (not just the *Bhagavadgītā*, Mbh. 6.23–40, but the whole *parvan*, Mbh. 6.14–41) was published posthumously. For a long time thereafter nothing further was done but there are now definite plans for his former student, James Fitzgerald, to continue the translation.⁶⁵

Subsequently, and in imitation of the *Mahābhārata* Critical Edition, the suggestion was put forward of a critical edition of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. The first abortive attempt was made by Raghu Vira, Director of the International Academy of Indian Culture at Lahore and editor of the *Virāṭaparvan* in the Critical Edition of the *Mahābhārata*, who in 1938 published a first fascicule containing the first six *sargas* of the *Bālakānda*; in this the established text is printed in a central column, flanked by one on the left giving ‘*vāṅga-viśeṣāḥ*’ and one on the right giving ‘*dakṣināpatha-viśeṣāḥ*’, with the lower half of the page providing manuscript variants (from 30 manuscripts, mainly in Lahore libraries) in the same three-column format.⁶⁶ In its layout, the exclusive use of Devanāgarī, and the large amount of the page left blank this fascicule gives a very different impression from the *Mahābhārata* Critical Edition; oddly, despite the use of Devanāgarī, hyphens were employed to separate the component parts of compound words and extensive use was made of *virāmas* and initial vowel signs to secure word division. Nothing further appeared and evidently the project foundered.

Then in 1950 P. C. Divanji published an open letter inviting donations to a scheme proposed by the Gujarat Research Society and indicating preliminary steps taken to realise it.⁶⁷ In 1951 the Oriental Institute, M. S. University of Baroda, formally undertook the project at the suggestion of the Gujarat Research Society and opened its *Rāmāyaṇa* Department. One of the first steps was the preparation of a list of about 2,500 *Rāmāyaṇa* manuscripts from available catalogues,

⁶⁵ *Mahābhārata* 1950–, *Mahābhārata* 1973–78 and *Bhagavadgītā* 1981. A personal communication from James Fitzgerald, 9th October 1996, indicated that the *Śrīparvan* and the first half of the *Śāntiparvan*, forming volume 7 of the whole translation, were nearing completion.

⁶⁶ *Rāmāyaṇa* 1938.

⁶⁷ Divanji 1950.

an appeal for the loan of manuscripts and for information about uncatalogued ones then followed, and around 200 manuscripts of different versions were obtained on loan from institutions and individuals.⁶⁸ Incidentally, the enormous number of manuscripts in existence (certainly far more than the 2,500 in this list) is a significant factor in the complexity of text reconstruction. A prospectus was published in 1955 and in the following year a specimen of the first *sarga* of the *Bālakānda*, prepared along the same lines as the *Mahābhārata* Critical Edition, was circulated to scholars. The Critical Edition of the *Rāmāyaṇa* was then published from Baroda between 1960 and 1975, under the general editorship first of G. H. Bhatt and later of U. P. Shah, using essentially the same philological and text-critical methods as employed by the *Mahābhārata* editors.

As with the *Mahābhārata* Critical Edition, apart from the Devanāgarī manuscripts, the *Rāmāyaṇa* Critical Edition groups its manuscripts by the script employed, but the numbers of manuscripts in each version varies considerably; for example, only one Maithilī manuscript was used for the *Ayodhyākānda* and no Orīya manuscripts for any book, although some in the Orissa State Museum and Library at Bhubaneswar were examined and at least one full set of Orīya manuscripts also exists in Calcutta (in the Asiatic Society Library, no. 5614 in the Government Collection). However, the text was constituted on the basis of the Southern Recension, which was considered to preserve the older form of the epic, a view which goes back to Jacobi, although it has been challenged from time to time. The reason for the greater conservatism of the Southern Recension is perhaps to be found in the earlier religious significance of the text in the south, for which indirect evidence is provided by the commentators, whose motives were religious. From the manuscripts available a selection were collated and then a further selection made for inclusion in the Critical Apparatus, with the result that ultimately 37 manuscripts were utilised for the *Bālakānda*, 29 for the *Ayodhyākānda*, 29 also for the *Aranyakānda*, 32 for the *Kiśkindhākānda*, 29 again for the *Sundarakānda*, 34 for the *Yuddhakānda* and 41 for the *Uttarakānda*. The oldest manuscript used was one in Nevārī script dated to 1020 A.D.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ U. P. Shah (1980) gives an account of the collection and selection of mss for the CE, with particular attention to the Malayalam manuscripts and some comment on particular passages in the light of manuscript evidence.

⁶⁹ The manuscript, in the Bir Library, Kathmandu (no. 934), contains all seven books but the date (V.S. 1076 = 1020 A.D.) is found in the colophon of the *Kiśkindhākānda* and applies only to the preceding books.

The text resulting, as with the *Mahābhārata* Critical Edition, is significantly shorter than the vulgate. The precise figures are again listed here for reference and are those used for calculations of frequency of various features in chapters 7–9. The overall length of the text is 19,100 verses (comprising 18241.5 *ślokas* and 858.5 verses in longer metres) in 606 *sargas* (with an average length of 32 verses).

Bālakāṇḍa contains 1973.5 verses in 76 *sargas* (average length 26 verses),

Ayodhyākāṇḍa contains 3289 verses in 111 *sargas* (average 30),

Aranyakāṇḍa contains 2099.5 verses in 71 *sargas* (average 30),

Kiśkindhākāṇḍa contains 2005.5 verses in 66 *sargas* (average 30),

Sundarakāṇḍa contains 2521.5 verses in 66 *sargas* (average 38),

Yuddhakāṇḍa contains 4491 verses in 116 *sargas* (average 39), and

Uttarakāṇḍa contains 2720 verses in 100 *sargas* (average 27).⁷⁰

The *Rāmāyaṇa* Critical Edition too has prompted the undertaking of translations, of which the most significant is that into English undertaken by a team of translators headed by Robert Goldman. The first volume was translated by the general editor; although it appeared in 1984, Goldman noted that he began work on it around ten years earlier.⁷¹ The relatively equal weighting assigned to introduction, translation and annotation is one of the features of the project. Besides Goldman's essays on the *Rāmāyaṇa* as a whole, its history and historicity, the *Bālakāṇḍa*, and the translation and its annotation, the introduction includes a survey of the Critical Edition by Sheldon Pollock. It is questionable whether Goldman has fully made out his case for the composition of the *Bālakāṇḍa* extending over 'at least four hundred years', beginning as early as the fifth century B.C., although he has certainly made out a good case for believing that the *Bālakāṇḍa* is more complex than has often been supposed. The translation itself adopts the style in which each verse is normally numbered separately and starts a new line; while the *śloka* is usually end-stopped, it is essentially a narrative metre and this is obscured by such paragraphing of a prose translation. The fullness of the annotations is largely due to the prominence given to the theological

⁷⁰ In these figures (unlike those for the *Mahābhārata*), allowance for *ślokas* with 1 or 3 lines has been made in the totals, which have been calculated by Mary Brockington. The average lengths have again been rounded to the nearest whole number.

⁷¹ *Rāmāyaṇa* 1984–: I, *Bālakāṇḍa*. Introduction and translation by Robert P. Goldman; annotation by Goldman and Sally J. Sutherland.

interpretations of the commentators, which means that Śrīvaiṣṇavism is often given greater emphasis than the original meaning and purpose of a passage, especially since it is coupled with relative neglect of the evidence of the *Mahābhārata*.

The second volume, translated by Sheldon Pollock, came out within two years of the first volume.⁷² In its introduction Pollock concentrates on the *Ayodhyākānda*, though not infrequently referring to other books and in particular to the *Aranyakānda*. He develops the interesting argument that, while an integral theme of the epics as a whole is kingship, Vālmīki is concerned, especially in the *Ayodhyākānda*, to develop an ethical model for kingship, for which Rāma's behaviour is of course paradigmatic. He also has some instructive comments on narrative discrepancies over Kaikeyī's boons, seeing them as an attempt by Vālmīki to preserve Daśaratha's honesty and integrity against the implications of political opportunism involved in the idea of the *rājyaśulka*, which he sees as the older version. The third volume is also translated by Pollock.⁷³ In the introduction, he castigates previous scholars who attempted to isolate an original *Rāmāyaṇa* within the epic and reveals his own commitment to regarding the received text as the basic unit of analysis. Pollock uses the apparent dichotomy between the *Ayodhyākānda*, focusing on problems of court life, and the *Aranyakānda*, with its fantastic and magical aspect, as the starting point for an examination of the question of interpolation in the *Rāmāyaṇa*. The first three, relatively brief sections affirm the coherence of the *Aranyakānda* with the *Ayodhyākānda*, provide a summary and point to similarities between the *Rāmāyaṇa* and European romance (in very general terms, which on that level are unexceptionable), while subsequent sections are adapted from articles already published.

Ten years after the appearance of the first volume, the translation passed the half-way mark with the publication of the fourth volume, translated by Rosalind Lefeber.⁷⁴ Her introduction is restricted to issues relating specifically to this volume; the main topics discussed are the description of the four directions (Rām. 4.39–42), Rāma's allies and the death of Vālin. Lefeber notes that 'no verses stating or even im-

⁷² *Rāmāyaṇa* 1984–: II (1986), *Ayodhyākānda*. Introduction, translation, and annotation by Sheldon I. Pollock.

⁷³ *Rāmāyaṇa* 1984–: III (1991), *Aranyakānda*. Introduction, translation, and annotation by Sheldon I. Pollock.

⁷⁴ *Rāmāyaṇa* 1984–: IV (1994), *Kiśkindhākānda*. Introduction, translation, and annotation by Rosalind Lefeber.

plying Rāma's divinity remain in the critical text', to qualify Pollock's remarks in his introduction to the *Aranyakānda*. With regard to the commentaries, she remarks on the efforts to establish a sound text in Uḍāli Varadaraja's *Vivekatilaka* and Rāmānuja's *Rāmānujiya*, as well as noting that both are unpublished.

Broader studies of the epics (since the Critical Editions)

The publication of the Critical Editions, permitting a clearer view of each, has been a major factor in the renewal of interest in the two epics. Nevertheless, many of the studies published have preferred both to attempt to make sense of the *Mahābhārata*—work on the *Rāmāyaṇa* has been more limited—by bringing to it some schema into which the evidence is fitted and at the same time to treat the work as a unity. There are, however, problems with assuming that the *Mahābhārata*'s meaning is concealed behind some sort of symbolic code, especially one that only twentieth-century Western scholarship has been able to unravel. There is no good reason why the overt statements of the text should be dismissed, as has sometimes been the tendency, and there is need by close and accurate attention to the texts (and to the history of their transmission) to establish as precisely as possible their actual content before elaborate superstructures are erected on a possibly shaky foundation. On the other hand, whatever their limitations, such theoretical approaches have at times illuminated the texts and have acted as a stimulus to further research.

In the remaining part of this chapter some of the main studies to attempt a broader approach to the epics will be introduced, leaving those which have looked at more specific aspects until later chapters. The two most notable structural approaches are no doubt those of Georges Dumézil and Madeleine Biardeau, who one might say have approached the epic from opposite ends, the former seeing it in terms of Indo-European common themes and the latter as revealing 'a universe of *bhakti*', that is, the outlook of the Purāṇas, but both seeing in the *Mahābhārata* battle the transposition into epic of eschatological myth.

Dumézil's own publications on the *Mahābhārata* were in fact preceded by Stig Wikander's study in which he put forward the claim of a mythic substructure to the *Mahābhārata*. He suggested that the five Pāṇḍava heroes were transpositions of the major Vedic deities,

and as such reflected the three Indo-European functions or orders, which Dumézil argues were typical of Indo-European religion and society: the sacerdotal-legislative, the martial-kingly, and the popular-fertile, pointing out a number of striking analogies between the Norse story of the Battle of Brávellir (Saxo, *Gesta Danorum* 8) and the *Mahābhārata* narrative, especially in the blind kings Harald Hildetand of Denmark and Dhṛtarāṣṭra.⁷⁵ Thus Yudhiṣṭhīra is a projection of Mitra (replaced by Dharma because by the time of the epic *dharma* expressed the substance of Mitra) and so represented the first function of the sovereign; Arjuna and Bhīma respectively are projections of the warrior deities Indra and Vāyu, representing the *kṣatriya* second function; Nakula and Sahadeva are projections of the Aśvins and represent the third function associated with the *viś*; while their marriage to Draupadī reflects the association of a female deity with the male gods of the three functions. Wikander identified Draupadī's divine prototype in the Iranian goddess Anāhitā, who is seen by Dumézil as trivalent and has her Indian equivalent in Sarasvatī. Ten years later, in 1957, Wikander concentrated on the twins and differentiated them in terms of their respective roles in the narrative: Nakula, for example, is handsome, fearless and a horse-breaker; Sahadeva is defined as peace-loving, an indifferent warrior and a cattle-keeper.⁷⁶ Although together they clearly represent the third function, Nakula has second-function aspects, while his brother is more firmly a representative of the third. Since the Veda and the ritual texts effectively do not differentiate the Aśvins, Dumézil argues that this feature goes back to features of Indo-European mythology which must have been passed down by oral tradition to the authors of the *Mahābhārata*, whereas the Vedic theology of the Aśvins is the result of a deliberate reform. The *Mahābhārata* itself does, of course, present the five brothers as sons of the gods, so fathered to get round the curse pronounced on Pāṇḍu. For Dumézil and his school this is a conscious transformation of the Vedic gods into epic heroes and indeed Wikander argues that it took place very early since Bhīma's character suggests the Indo-Iranian rather than the Vedic Vāyu. Subsequently Dumézil made further investigations of the *Mahābhārata* and its heroes.⁷⁷ Karna is Sūrya, who in the epic story fathers him on Kuntī before her mar-

⁷⁵ Wikander 1947.

⁷⁶ Wikander 1957.

⁷⁷ See especially Dumézil 1968–73 (mainly vols. 1–2), but also 1954, 1959 and 1977.

riage, and Dumézil compares his two mothers (Kuntī and his adoptive mother, Rādhā) to the two mothers of the sun in the Vedas, the night and the dawn. Dumézil notes that no hero incarnates Varuṇa, Bhaga or Aryaman and asserts Pāṇḍu ought to have been the incarnation of Varuṇa, Dhṛtarāṣṭra of Bhaga and Vidura of Aryaman, since their characters derive from these deities. Bhīṣma, the elder statesman figure, is regarded as an incarnation of the sky-god, Dyu, who hardly figures in the *Rgveda*, however, and is totally absent from all later Indian mythology (further proof for Dumézil that the transpositions underlying the epic must have taken place at a very early period). In general terms, Dumézil sees the *Mahābhārata* equally with the Scandinavian myth of the Ragnarök as developing an ancient eschatological conflict in three phases: a rigged game, by which evil triumphs for a long period, then the great battle in which the good takes revenge and finally eliminates the evil, and thirdly the government of the good. At such a general level, however, many other works of literature might be made to fit this schema without great difficulty.

Illuminating as much of Dumézil's analysis is, there are problems with a view which sees such a vast work as the *Mahābhārata* as essentially an extended allegory, in which the epic conflict should be read as a transposition of an Indo-European myth of universal destruction and renewal. To put it in a slightly different way, it is difficult to harmonise the epic's literary qualities with a view that it is basically a kind of code. There are also difficulties with the details of some of his identifications; a particularly obvious example is Draupadī, who for him must be the transposition of the Indo-European trivalent goddess, but who in the *Mahābhārata* itself is declared to be a part of Śrī and later, when Śrī becomes closely linked with Viṣṇu, of Indra's consort Śacī.⁷⁸ The reality is that Śrī was originally a symbol of sovereignty and as such possessed by many rulers and above all Indra (e.g. Mbh. 12.124, 218 and 221); she is therefore a natural model for Draupadī. In general, it may be noted that Dumézil gives a less than adequate account of Kṛṣṇa and his significance. He does address this issue in one article,⁷⁹ where he notes the close association of Kṛṣṇa with Arjuna, ascribing it to the Vedic links between Indra

⁷⁸ Cf. Hiltzebeitel 1976b: 144–47 for a discussion of Dumézil's ideas on this point. Various interpolated passages do in fact follow the logic of the situation in making Rukminī a form of Śrī and Draupadī of Śacī, but this is not found in the text.

⁷⁹ Dumézil 1956; cf. also his 1953 article.

and Viṣṇu, especially to Viṣṇu taking his three strides to help Indra in his slaying of Vṛtra. He sees a reflex of this in Arjuna's slaying of Bhīṣma, where Kṛṣṇa twice gets down from the chariot to take several steps towards Bhīṣma before being restrained by Arjuna, who on the third occasion plucks up courage to attack Bhīṣma himself. But this is a relatively minor episode, and the larger questions of the shift in importance between Indra and Viṣṇu and of the significance of this for his overall scheme are not answered, although he does address the relationship between Viṣṇu and Śiva (which he reasonably sees as later) in terms of Kṛṣṇa's opposition to Aśvatthāman. It can, however, reasonably be said that Dumézil's transposition theory is too static to take account of all the *Mahābhārata* evidence.

Dumézil's views have certainly proved influential, though more so in France than among English-speaking scholars, but equally they have always had their critics. One of the most trenchant is the Dutch scholar Jan Gonda who, for example, contributed to a Symposium on the achievement of Georges Dumézil a wide-ranging critique of his ideas. Gonda points out the importance in Indian literature of triads unconnected with the three social groups, he disagrees with Dumézil's characterisation of Varuṇa and Mitra and questions whether the *Mahābhārata* 'could have as its main theme nothing more than the transposition of an almost forgotten and no longer actual mythologeme that could hardly serve to explain the socio-religious situation known to the post-Vedic generations'.⁸⁰ Gonda also, and with some justice, charges Dumézil with a rather selective use of material. Other scholars have differed from Dumézil on some points while accepting at least elements of his approach. For example, as noted in the previous chapter, Bruce Sullivan examines the portrayal of Vyāsa in the *Mahābhārata*, shows how both Vyāsa and Bhīṣma (identified with Dyaus) have similarities to Brahmā through their title of grandfather, argues that Vyāsa's role in the story corresponds to Brahmā's activities and concludes that Brahmā's functions, traits and even epithets have been incarnated in the figure of Vyāsa.⁸¹

Another Dutch scholar, F. B. J. Kuiper, has stressed that the structure within the group of Pāṇḍavas is only of secondary importance compared with the antithesis between their group as a whole and the Kauravas, reviving his compatriot Held's idea that the Pāṇḍavas

⁸⁰ Gonda 1974: 143.

⁸¹ Sullivan 1990b.

and Kauravas in the epic represent respectively the Devas and Asuras, the old dualistic pattern.⁸² Gösta Johnsen then took this a stage further by identifying Dhṛtarāṣṭra as Varuṇa's alter ego in a survey of various views of the *Mahābhārata* leading to its interpretation as basically made up of elements of a cosmic dualism, the antagonism between Devas and Asuras.⁸³ Jöhnson then compares the contention over Draupadī with the story of Śrī deserting Bali for Indra (Mbh. 12.218) and, after noting the large number of coincidences in name between the sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Nāgas and the links between Varuṇa and snakes, proposes that Dhṛtarāṣṭra represents Varuṇa.

A quite different attempt to outline a mythological framework within which the narrative of the *Mahābhārata* can be located is that of Georg von Simson who seeks to construct from various hints in the narrative a series of correspondences between the major figures and elements of nature mythology, mainly aspects of the sun and moon along with the planets.⁸⁴ He also explores the possible Vedic and Indo-European background (the latter mainly through analogies with Greek mythology). He then argues that during the redaction of the epic this structure of the battle as the expression of a year myth 'was superficially adapted to the structure of the four *yugas*' and 'the whole event was represented as a historical occurrence of the hoary past by interpolating it into the existing dynastic history.' While I think that there are problems in accepting this interpretation as it stands, it does have the merit of taking seriously both the older background (the Vedic and Indo-European material) and the internal developments within the *Mahābhārata*, which point forward to classical Hinduism. Elsewhere he points out that the name of Kumbhakarṇa is synonymous with Dronakarṇa, which if split would yield Droṇa and Karṇa; for such splitting, he cites as parallels Kuśa and Lava from *kuślava* and Dr̥dha and Saṃdha beside Dr̥dhasaṃdha as sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra.⁸⁵

It is the strength of Madeleine Biardeau's interpretation—stimulated by Dumézil's work, though differing significantly from it—that she has emphasised these links forward and to that extent been able to give a more comprehensive and discerning account of Krṣṇa as the

⁸² Kuiper 1961.

⁸³ Johnsen 1965–66.

⁸⁴ von Simson 1984.

⁸⁵ von Simson 1968. He also points out various chthonic associations of the two epic heroes and in particular notes the structural similarity between Kumbhakarṇa and Karṇa, neither of whom initially participates in the war concerned.

avatāra of Viṣṇu, and also of Śiva.⁸⁶ But her model is also to a large extent a static one, for she explicitly adopts an ahistorical approach, arguing that the basic forms of Hinduism are unchanging—the basic structural relationships of high and low, pure and impure and even the complementarity of Viṣṇu and Śiva. She brings to the text a rigorous structural analysis which is based on the premise that every component is crucial to the meaning of the narrative taken as a coherent whole and that a semantic system is discernible within the text which provides the basis for decoding the meaning of the narrative. While she broadly accepts Dumézil's view of the five Pāṇḍavas, her wish to set the *Mahābhārata* in relationship with contemporary Hinduism means that their interpretations not infrequently diverge.⁸⁷

Perhaps the most obvious feature of her interpretation is the emphasis on the presence, indeed the pervasiveness, of *bhakti* in the *Mahābhārata* and of the *avatāra* ideology. In this scheme, the old dilemma of the complexity of moral issues in the epic is resolved by proposing that it is through submitting themselves to the *avatāra* in devotion that the good (especially the good kings or princes) triumph over evil in the same way as the *avatāra* defeats the *asuras*. Since the *avatāra* must destroy evil and restore order, he unites two opposing aspects and, in mythological terms, he is Viṣṇu but fulfills the functions of both Rudra and Viṣṇu/Nārāyaṇa; equally, the *pralaya* myth coincides with the myth of *avatāraṇa*. Curiously, given this and her ahistorical stance, it is Biardeau herself who has drawn attention to the poor fit between the *avatāra* concept and the Purāṇic *yuga* theory, which is in the process of development in the *Mahābhārata*. However, one of her most significant ideas is the complementarity of Viṣṇu and Śiva which, she believes, structures the 'myth' of the *Mahābhārata*. Since for her *bhakti* has its prominence in Hinduism through incorporating sacrificial, yogic and renunciatory values, she finds the complementarity of these two deities already in the Brāhmaṇas, where Viṣṇu is identified with sacrifice and Śiva is the necessary counterpart who wards off the dangers from outside the sacrificial context. She also sees the climax of the epic in terms of the *pralaya*, the cosmic dissolution which ends the *yuga* cycle, and correspondingly discerns

⁸⁶ Biardeau 1968–78.

⁸⁷ It is perhaps relevant that Biardeau's work on the *Mahābhārata* follows her study of Purāṇic mythology. For some comment on the contrast between Dumézil and Biardeau in this respect, see van Buitenen in *Mahābhārata* 1973–78: III, 163–64.

Śiva's presence as destroyer in parts of the narrative, particularly in the person of Aśvathāman in the *Sauptikaparvan*. Although the events of the *Mahābhārata* are said to take place in the juncture, *sandhyā*, between two *yugas*, the symbolism is that of the end of a *kalpa*. Biardeau sees the reabsorption of everything into Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa at the *pralaya* reflected on a reduced level in the ascetic life of the Pāṇḍavas in the forest, which from another perspective is the period of consecration before the sacrifice of the impending battle, a sacrifice comparable to the cosmic conflagration at the end of a *kalpa*.

Alf Hiltebeitel has reviewed the impact of Dumézil's work and stresses that Dumézil combines the synchronic and the diachronic approaches, arguing in general for a combination of approaches; elsewhere he has a review essay on Biardeau's studies of Purāṇic Hinduism and her interpretation of *bhakti*, agreeing with her that the *Mahābhārata* is, at least in part, the reflection of a mythic eschatological crisis.⁸⁸ In his own book Hiltebeitel attempts by text-study to analyse the 'structural relations' between the *Mahābhārata* and Hindu and Indo-European mythology and ritual, employing a relatively undogmatic approach but building on the work of both Dumézil and Biardeau.⁸⁹ He seeks to resolve the problem, implicit in their work, that the epic is reduced to something other than itself, whether myth or ritual. Taking the view that epic is a unique subcategory or variety of legend, Hiltebeitel examines major episodes (for example, the dice game, Draupadi's marriage, the *Bhagavadgītā* and the theophanies, and the deaths of the four Kaurava *senāpatis*) to show the significance of Kṛṣṇa's role. He recognises the general complementarity of Viṣṇu and Śiva as the reconstitutive and destructive elements in the cosmic progression and considers that oppositions and relations between them are too embedded in the epic to be explained away as interpolations: 'The activities of these deities seem rather to have been worked into the epic in an early, formative period of the poem's construction.'⁹⁰ The epic reflects the relationship between cosmic order and human destiny and also has analogies to other epics in an Indo-European continuum belonging to a heroic age.

Hiltebeitel pays particular attention to the role of Kṛṣṇa (including a discussion of the three Kṛṣṇas: Kṛṣṇa Vāsudeva, Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana

⁸⁸ Hiltebeitel 1974 (also 1976b: 300–309 and 354–69) and 1983.

⁸⁹ Hiltebeitel 1976b.

⁹⁰ Hiltebeitel 1976b: 174.

Vyāsa, Kṛṣṇā Draupadī), analysing incidents where he plays a decisive role (even when absent) and making a comparison between Kṛṣṇa and Odin; he suggests that Kṛṣṇa's role is to perceive the hidden structure of *dharma*. He sees the theophany in the *Bhagavadgītā* as reminiscent of the *pralaya* (in agreement with Biardeau), while connecting Kṛṣṇa's theophany to Duryodhana with the three steps of the Vāmana *avatāra* and seeing it as an Indian version of an archaic method of declaring war. Hiltebeitel also brings out the importance of Śrī as the personification of royal prosperity, while offering a more nuanced interpretation of both Śrī and Draupadī; this chapter on Śrī and the Source of Sovereignty includes some interesting remarks on possible links between Śrī and the golden lotus, the Irish goddess Flaith Érenn (Sovereignty of Ireland) and a 'fawn with a golden lustre', and the motif of the royal deer hunt (including Rāma and the golden deer). He regards the theme of royal virtues, which he discerns in this material and sees as central to the epic, as establishing that there is no separation between didactic and narrative elements in the *Mahābhārata*. The quest for sovereignty entails the committing of sins, with a comparison of the sins of Indra with those of Yudhiṣṭhira as an inevitable part of their restoration to rule, although Hiltebeitel also remarks elsewhere that 'only among heroes, as essentially human figures, can the full implications of violations and misdeeds be worked out and understood as sins'.⁹¹ The place of sins in the structure of the epic is illustrated by the deaths of the four Kaurava generals (three of which involve an immoral act by Yudhiṣṭhira) and in the context of the ritual of battle the sinful act is a ritual necessity but one that can be expiated, as is done in the *asvamedha*.

Hiltebeitel has thus brought out the relevance not only of myth but also of ritual in understanding the outlook of the *Mahābhārata* poets. Both Hiltebeitel and Heino Gehrts (who comes to the study of both Sanskrit epics from the study of German folktales, while acknowledging a debt to both Dahlmann and Dumézil) have suggested that aspects of the battle are modelled on sacrificial themes, most significantly the death of Abhimanyu as a *soma* sacrifice, while Biardeau has put forward the view that the events leading up to the war, in particular the forest exile and its climax in the year in disguise, form

⁹¹ Hiltebeitel 1976b: 47. Immediately before this he remarks that 'some sins are more clearly limited to heroes, such as sacrilege and impiety (only in India could Indra, a god, commit a sacrilege by killing a brahmin).'

a kind of *dikṣā*, the ritual consecration before a sacrifice. Whereas van Buitenen has demonstrated that the *Sabhāparvan*, which centres on Yudhiṣṭhira's consecration and the dice match, is modelled on the *rājasūya*, Gehrts has argued on more tenuous grounds that the whole *Mahābhārata* narrative is an extended *rājasūya*, the account of which in the *Sabhāparvan* is incomplete.⁹² In particular, the battle itself is the actual, ritually significant dice match, the dice game in the *Sabhāparvan* being falsified by treachery, and the main events of the ritual as well as of the epic narrative, are held to be the weakening of the king and his regaining of his power; Gehrts finds the main support for his arguments in a passage rejected from the text of the Critical Edition (2 App. 30), since he relies throughout on the Roy-Ganguli translation. Though modelled on the *rājasūya*, the epic narrative contains an element of criticism of the ritual and this is seen as a symptom of the shift in values taking place at that period from the *pravṛtti* values seen in ritual to those of *nivṛtti*. Incidentally, Gehrts does emphasise Kṛṣṇa's closeness to Arjuna, whom he regards as the main kingly figure among the Pāṇḍavas, but sees Kṛṣṇa as embodying the spirit of ritualist solutions (an explanation for some of his advice to break the code of *kṣatriya* conduct).⁹³

The Indo-European perspective in various forms, especially on the *Mahābhārata*, has proved popular. For example, the Indo-Europeanist Jaan Puhvel starts from Jacobi's recognition that the *Rāmāyaṇa* is 'closely analogous to the Indra-mythology of the Vedas' and from Wikander's and Dumézil's insights into the *Mahābhārata*, and ranges widely over early literature in various Indo-European languages in an attempt to show that 'Indo-European saga and epic is overwhelmingly a special projection of Indo-European mythical inheritance'.⁹⁴ The anthropologist N. J. Allen seeks to amplify Dumézil's trifunctional model by adding a fourth function, which can have either positively valued or devalued aspects, and has examined in particular two narratives of a hero's wanderings.⁹⁵ These are, from the *Mahābhārata*, the story of how Arjuna undertakes a twelve-year pilgrimage on his own, visiting the four quarters and at each encountering one or more females, and from the *Odyssey*, the story of how Odysseus, during

⁹² Gehrts 1975.

⁹³ The weaknesses of the arguments that Gehrts puts forward are clearly shown in the review by Hiltebeitel (1977).

⁹⁴ Puhvel 1974.

⁹⁵ Allen 1993 and 1995a; cf. also 1995b and 1996.

his extended journey home from the siege of Troy, meets a series of women. Despite obvious differences in the narratives, there are a number of similarities: in both cases, the hero is already married before the journey starts and returns at its end to this primary wife (Draupadī/Penelope), he starts with companions but loses them, and at one of the four locations on his journey meets water monsters (Vargā and her four sisters/Scylla and Charybdis), with whom the encounter is not sexual. In particular the first encounter is with a female possessing magical powers who takes the initiative sexually (Ulūpī/Circe), while the second is longer lasting and produces a son, who later fights with his father (Citrāngadā bears Babhruvāhana to Arjuna/Calypso bears Telegonus to Odysseus). The number of similarities listed is indeed striking and Allen suggests that they are not likely to have been due to borrowing but that a common Indo-European origin is a more likely explanation; he sees the similarities as based in fact on certain basic types of marriage custom inherited from the proto-Indo-European period, arguing that this is clearly visible in Arjuna's relationships (e.g. the marriage with Subhadrā by capture, that with Citrāngadā by bride-price, that with Ulūpī in effect as *kanyādāna*) and reducing the eight types of marriage listed in *Manu* to five forms (thus corresponding to the five relationships of each hero). Since the *Mahābhārata* narrative has preserved this more transparently, it is likely to have been the more conservative tradition, even though the *Odyssey* is the earlier of the two epics.

An Iranianist, Julian Baldick, has approached the issue by suggesting that the Homeric epics should be studied in the light of narratives in other Indo-European languages and in particular Sanskrit, on the grounds that they correspond to the prototypes of Indian and Iranian epics.⁹⁶ Specifically, he claims that the *Iliad* corresponds to the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Odyssey* to the *Mahābhārata*, although he also draws on other material, among them the *Shāh Nāmah* of Firdawsi, the early history of Rome, the Scandinavian *Poetic Edda* and Saxo's *Gesta Danorum*. The methodology adopted is a modification of Dumézil's, mainly in that the three functions are seen as being reflected as sub-concepts within each member of the triad. In his summaries of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* he concentrates on the religious, mythical and ideological substrate (and so on passages which support his interpretation) and on

⁹⁶ Baldick 1994.

mention of the gods. However, several of his parallels are trivial or may reasonably be regarded as universal themes, found in any literature. On other occasions, comparisons are passed over that might have been expected. If Hector is to be compared to Kumbhakarna, despite their very different natures, the deer with golden horns which Heracles has to capture may as reasonably be compared to the golden deer which Rāma is sent to capture by Sītā. The discussion of Patroclus' funeral is marred by inaccuracies in presentation of the Indian material, such as the suggestion that Agni is placed last and the implications of the fact that Vibhīṣaṇa conducts Rāvaṇa's funeral. For the test set to the suitors of stringing Odysseus's bow and shooting an arrow through the holes in twelve axe-heads, besides the example given of Arjuna at the contest for Draupadī's hand, Rāma's breaking Janaka's great bow at the contest for Sītā's hand and his shooting an arrow through seven *sāl* trees as proof for Sugrīva of his ability could have been mentioned, since these show the wide spread of the motif (and the second is in some ways closer to the *Odyssey* example). Baldick opts for transmission of Indo-Iranian epics to the Greeks as the main explanation for the 'extreme similarities' between the Homeric and Sanskrit epics, but with elements of a proto-Indo-European epic tradition and some borrowing from the Homeric epics into the Sanskrit epics as subsidiary factors.

Attempts to establish a common Indo-European background, whether in myth or in oral epic, are indeed complicated by the possibility that the Greeks and the Romans did know of the Sanskrit epics through contacts with India. Dio Chrysostomus states that the Indians had a translation of Homer in their own language (53.6) and, given the broad similarities between the battles of the *Mahābhārata* and the *Iliad*, this is most probably a reference to the *Mahābhārata*. With less plausibility, Josette Lallemand suggests that Virgil could have known the *Mahābhārata* on the basis of similarities between the portrayal of Aeneas and the Pāṇḍavas, Turnus and Duryodhana, and Latinus and Dhṛtarāṣṭra; other supporting evidence adduced includes the 18 days of both battles, the exchange of delegates seeking peace before the start of the war, and certain details common to the *Śalyaparvan* and *Aeneid* 12. None of this is conclusive and the differences are substantial.⁹⁷

⁹⁷ Lallemand 1959.

Comparative approaches have also, however, included comparison of the *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyaṇa* with epic poems from other cultures more generally and without necessarily any suggestion of common descent, although it can be combined with the Indo-European approach. This assumes that the two Sanskrit works are indeed epics in the generally accepted sense of that term, which is perhaps an over-simplified view, but this type of approach has yielded significant insights. Pavel Grintser accepts that the history on which epic is based is not identical with actual events and that all epics blend together events that are separated by several centuries: it was not the task of the epic singers to write history and it was quite possible for them to combine reminiscences of events belonging to different historical periods.⁹⁸ The first part of his book, on the oral and written tradition in the old Indian epic, develops ideas in earlier articles on epic formulæ in the *Mahābhārata*, which will be examined further in the next chapter, but Grintser also briefly addresses the issue of transitional texts and affirms that the text of the Sanskrit epics, in the form in which it has been transmitted in manuscripts, is not a simple transcription of an oral performance. He dismisses the idea of a considerable period of time during which the poems received a fixed ‘transitional’ form on the grounds that it would be impossible to transmit such vast epics in a rigorously fixed form. He suggests that traces of the influence of a written tradition are due to changes introduced subsequently and that both epics existed already as fully completed poems in the oral stage of their composition. The second part of his book, ‘Typology of the ancient Indian Epic’, is a wide-ranging comparison of the *Mahābhārata* with epics from other cultures in which fundamental problems about the relationship between folktale, myth and epic are discussed. He first, developing a point made by Viktor Zhirmunsky, draws attention to the fact that there is remarkable uniformity in the motifs and plots of heroic epics and adds that the typological similarities have also produced a similarity in the organisation of the material as a whole, explicable because their plots are constructed in similar ways and they share the same principles and methods of composition. Grintser defines the *Mahābhārata* as classical heroic epic (not, that is, the archaic epic represented, for example, by some of the oldest Russian *bylinas*, but similar to the *Iliad*, the Kazakh

⁹⁸ Grintser 1974: 171–3.

oral epic *Manas* and others) partly transformed into a late epic (those with a religious, didactic element, such as the *Caedmon* cycle).

Grintser's discussion of the typology of the *Mahābhārata* has been continued by another Russian scholar, Yaroslav Vassilkov, in a more recent paper.⁹⁹ Vassilkov makes the point that in the way that, for example, the story of the Pāṇḍavas' struggle with Jarāśamdhā is modelled on the myth of the battle between the thunder-god and his demonic adversary (which he affirms as an Indo-European myth), the *Mahābhārata* moulds its historical material according to mythic and ritual patterns, thus attesting the persistence of the archaic type of the epic. Vassilkov therefore emphasises that, while the *Mahābhārata* did go through the stage of the classical heroic epic and was partly transformed into a religious, didactic epic, it also retained throughout some features of epic folklore at the archaic stage; he sees this as constituting the true uniqueness of the *Mahābhārata*. 'There is no other epic in the world which combines in the same way the features of all three main historical stages of development: archaic, classical and late.'

So far, the only major attempt to apply to the *Rāmāyaṇa* the kind of interpretative approach typified by Dumézil's and Biardeau's work on the *Mahābhārata* is that by Daniel Dubuisson,¹⁰⁰ who provides an analysis of the so-called three sins of Rāma: the underhand killing of Vālin, the sacrilege of *brahmahatyā* in killing Rāvaṇa and the surprising repudiation of Sītā. These are immediately recognisable as Dumézil's 'three faults of the warrior' but the degree of their applicability to the *Rāmāyaṇa* is less obvious, despite his efforts to show that they underlie the structure of the narrative. Dubuisson treats each of these episodes in detail in the first half of his book but then continues with an examination of the theological structure which he sees as shaping the relationship between Rāma and the other main characters. Here he has a good deal of interest to say about the analogies between Rāma and Indra, and correspondingly of Lakṣmaṇa with Viṣṇu, the *vānaras* with the Maruts, and Rāvaṇa with Trisiras. However, the problem remains of resolving what he himself admits is not the least of the paradoxes of the Rāma story: the transformation of the archaic theme of the three faults first into a narrative glorifying violence in support of the social order and ultimately into

⁹⁹ Vassilkov 1995.

¹⁰⁰ Dubuisson 1986; cf. also his earlier articles (1979 and 1983–84).

a religious work built around a compassionate deity. His analysis increases rather than reduces the complexities inherent in the development of the *Rāmāyaṇa* and he never really explains—any more than Dumézil—how the process of transposition actually takes place. Incidentally, Dubuisson elsewhere rightly and vigorously castigates the view put forward by David Ward in his study of ‘the divine twins’ that the best Indian version of this theme is provided by Rāma and Lakṣmana, who embody the attributes of the Aśvins, and he emphasises the errors and omissions involved.¹⁰¹

On a smaller scale the Iranianist Marijan Molé examines a parallel with the *Shāh Nāmah* and then propounds a tripartite structure in the relationships between Daśaratha’s four sons.¹⁰² He notes the occurrence of weapons as Kṛśāsva’s sons (Rām. 1.20.13–14, also 25.18a and 27.9a) in the narrative of Viśvāmitra coming to claim the young Rāma’s help and compares this with Rustam, whom he regards as the principal representative in the *Shāh Nāmah* of the Iranian equivalent Kṛsāspa, and his receiving the arms that belonged to Sām before his first great battle against the Turanians; the theme of the warrior initiation is too general to be significant and Kṛsāspa does not actually figure in the Iranian narrative (and Molé himself notes that Kṛśāsva is not an ancestor of Rāma in the way that Sām is of Rustam). Molé also asserts that Daśaratha’s four sons are clearly distinguished functionally, mainly on the basis of distinctions between their mothers (with Kausalyā representing order and justice, Kaikeyī being full of anger and Sumitrā subordinate), but he also concedes that the differentiation between the brothers is somewhat blurred in the epic (‘un peu estompée dans le poème’) with Bharata only to a limited extent representing the warrior function and the twins having only weak links with the third function, while the tripartite structure as such plays only a marginal role in the *Rāmāyaṇa*.

For the sake of completeness, mention should also be made of the contention by Gehrts that the *Rāmāyaṇa* is based on the folktale, ‘The Two Brothers’ (AaTh 303), where one brother, who has won a princess as bride by killing a dragon, is then killed by a witch and brought back to life by his brother.¹⁰³ As he sees it, the epic is mainly based

¹⁰¹ Dubuisson 1992, rebutting Ward 1968.

¹⁰² Molé 1960.

¹⁰³ Gehrts 1977, which develops ideas already outlined in Gehrts 1967.

on what he suggests is the oriental form of the folktale, where the bride is abducted and released, a metaphor for the loss and recovery of royal power in the *rājasūya* and *asvamedha*. While there undoubtedly are folktale elements in the *Rāmāyana* (and the *Rāmāyana* has influenced the Indian folktale tradition), his suggestion does too much violence to both stories and to the chronological issues involved to be in any sense plausible.¹⁰⁴ The main point that can be said in favour of his analysis is that he has recognised that the true comradeship of Rāma and his three brothers (it is a curious distortion of the story which ignores two of them) is being opposed to dissension between Vālin and Sugrīva and between Rāvaṇa and Vibhīṣaṇa, although his further suggestion that the contrast is possibly also to the Pāṇḍava brothers in the *Mahābhārata* seems most improbable.

The limitations of studying either of the epics without a full command of its contents are particularly obvious in this last example of recent broader studies, whereas some of the others mentioned have shown a much more profound understanding, based on closer study of the actual texts of the epics. In this regard, the publication of the Critical Editions—surveyed in the middle section of this chapter—has proved to be crucial, despite the occasional reservation that has been expressed. Accordingly, the next chapters devoted to each epic individually begin with an examination of the language and expression, which provides a basis first for an assessment of the process of growth and then for a survey of the historical and cultural data or realia and finally for a study of the religious aspects to each epic.

¹⁰⁴ For a detailed analysis of the relationship between Vālmiki's *Rāmāyana* and what is generally accepted as the Indic form of 'The Two Brothers', see Mary Brockington 1995a and 1995b.

CHAPTER THREE

THE *MAHĀBHĀRATA* (1)

Language and style

The language of both epics is clearly not classical Sanskrit, as that was fixed by the prestige of Pāṇini's grammar. The most usual designation for this variety of Sanskrit has been 'epic Sanskrit' but another term that has occasionally been applied is 'Kṣatriya Sanskrit'; in the sense that the epics clearly originated in an aristocratic, warrior milieu, the latter term obviously has considerable validity, but it certainly should not be taken to mean that this variety of Sanskrit was in any way the exclusive preserve of the *kṣatriya* class. In addition, the epics are only one of several classes of text written in a broadly similar non-Pāṇinian Sanskrit; others include some of the later Vedic texts—some of the Sūtras and more particularly of the Upaniṣads—and those texts written in Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit, as well as some types of inscriptional Sanskrit and, of course, particularly the Purāṇas (which, however, are very probably deliberately imitating the epic language and so cannot be regarded as independent of it). There has often been a tendency by scholars to classify all of these together as simply poor Sanskrit, produced by those whose command of the language was inferior to that of the educated brāhmans. This is to ignore the different factors which were or may have been at work in relation to the separate types of text: different regions of origin, membership of different social groups by their authors, employment of a particular register of language. However, these factors are still not as well understood as they might be (in part because the texts do not reveal much about these aspects of their production).

It is, therefore, more sensible and more realistic to examine the dialectal variation of each genre rather than to try to associate it with any particular social group (whether *kṣatriya* or any other) or region. Nevertheless, we may note that the occurrence of 'vernacular' features in some early Upaniṣads may be connected with the association of these Upaniṣads with the *kṣatriyas* by several scholars, most notably Paul Horsch, while more recently Richard Salomon has suggested

that the Upaniṣads in which the epic-vernacular language is more clearly represented are those of the *Atharvaveda* (the *Mundaka* and *Praśna Upaniṣads*) and that it is precisely this Veda which has been associated with the *kṣatriya* tradition, although there is no firm evidence of this in the Vedic references surveyed in the first chapter.¹ Most probably, as Salomon argues, we should think in terms of a spectrum of dialects or language registers from classical or Pāṇinian Sanskrit at one end to colloquial MIA at the other, with individuals controlling not just a single form of language but rather a range of varying extent. While we may expect similarities with other non-standard forms of Sanskrit, therefore, we need to investigate the usages of each genre on its own terms, recognising that features such as the identity of the speaker and his audience, the subject-matter, the degree of formality of the setting and regional factors will all be relevant. Elsewhere Salomon has given a summary of the features of the epic language which can provide a useful starting point for what follows: ‘Typical epic usages include: lax and sporadic application of *sandhi* rules; nonstandard verb endings, such as *-va* and *-ma* for *-vas* and *-mas* in the first person dual and plural present; nonstandard gerunds of the type *grhya*, *vimuktvā*, etc.; shifts in voice, *parasmaipada* to *ātmanepada* and *vice versa* (e.g. *bhavate*, *vartati*); extension of thematic conjugation types, and of the *it* affix (e.g. *nayisyati* = *nesyati*); and nonstandard noun morphology, such as nominative plural feminines in *-īs* (rather than *-ayas*).²

Among the earliest linguistic studies of parts of the *Mahābhārata* are those by Böhtlingk in various of his grammatical articles.³ However, the first full-scale treatment was that by the younger Holtzmann who collected a series of grammatical details from the Bombay and Calcutta editions in an article intended as a supplement to Whitney’s Sanskrit Grammar and arranged according to its paragraphs.⁴ He begins with certain phonological details such as interchange of *l* and *r* (where the Calcutta edition commonly has *l* for the *r* of the Bombay edition) and irregular sandhi; he notes three instances of plural used for dual (at 5.112.4a, 8.34.6a, 8.63.3) and various instances of anomalous use of cases and of irregular case forms; he continues with various declensional irregularities, including substantial lists of instances of interchange

¹ Horsch 1966: 432–44; Salomon 1995, esp. 298–300. For references to the Vedas see pp. 4–18.

² Salomon 1989: 276.

³ von Böhtlingk 1875: 478–502, also 1888 and 1897.

⁴ Holtzmann (jun.) 1884.

of *-antī* and *-atī* in the feminine participle stem and of irregular use of *parasmaipada* and *ātmanepada* (both features which have become recognised as typical of the epic language). He regards the use of *mā* with the unaugmented aorist as quite common, but without quantifying its frequency, as quite often with his comments, although some indication is often possible by totalling his examples. Overall, his monograph gives a useful picture of the main features of the language of the *Mahābhārata* but with the two-fold limitation that he was working from poorly edited texts and that he does not sufficiently indicate comparative frequency of the features that he notes.

Willibald Kirlfel, early in the 20th century, studied nominal composition in the Upaniṣads and the Epics, taking as his specimens from the Calcutta edition of the *Mahābhārata* the *Nalopākhyāna* (3.50–78), the *Rāmopākhyāna* (3.258–275) and the *Lokapālasabhākhyāna* (2.5–11), which are hardly the most representative selection available.⁵ On this basis he suggested, for example, that the *Mahābhārata* has gone much further in eliminating *samāhāra dvandvas* in favour of *itaretarayoga* forms than the *Rāmāyaṇa*, but that the two epics do not show significant differences in regard to *tatpuruṣa* and *karmadhāraya* formations; he also noted a marked difference in the frequency of *bahuṛīhi* forms between the passages selected, with the *Rāmopākhyāna* having half as many again as the other two, and the occurrence of as many as nine genitive *bahuṛīhis* with a gerundive as prior member in the *Nalopākhyāna*. In general, the *Nalopākhyāna* shows closer conformity to Pāṇini's description, which for Kirlfel indicated that it was earlier than the other two passages, whereas the opposite is likely to be the case.

The tendency merely to catalogue rather than to analyse has continued, however, even after the publication of the Critical Edition. In the very early stages, this is not surprising; thus, for example, Vittore Pisani gives some instances noted from his reading of the *Ādiparvan*: ablative use of the instrumental at 1.1.209 and 1.46.8; an instrumental standing for a locative at 1.20.3ab; an instrumental substituted by another form (i.e. *te*) at 1.68.66a; dative for genitive at 1.1600* 3; *pūrvam* where one would expect a locative at 1.68.70; similar *anacolutha* at 1.194.6–8, 2082*, 1.14.17; *nominativus pendens* at 1.15.5–9; and use of the vocative as in effect the stem form of the names at 1.127.21ab.⁶ Again, in the case of Franklin Edgerton, who listed

⁵ Kirlfel 1908.

⁶ Pisani 1946.

noteworthy grammatical features found while preparing his edition of the *Sabhāparvan*, this approach is understandable and indeed, to the extent that he updated older treatments from this much improved text, desirable.⁷ He lists 18 instances of hiatus between *pādas* and 8 within *pādas* (while noting that the manuscripts frequently try to bridge the hiatus by secondary changes), 19 examples of unaugmented preterites (mostly imperfects) and several instances of irregularities of personal endings. The syntactical items that he notes are more sporadic (and most were already noted by Holtzmann and others); he also includes a long list of vocabulary apparently specific to the *Sabhāparvan*. Edgerton's figures for hiatus in the *Sabhāparvan* may be compared with those established by S. K. De for the *Ādi*, *Udyoga* and *Drona parvans*, where we find 22, 5 and no instances of hiatus between *pādas* respectively and 29, 14 and 5 instances of hiatus within *pādas*.⁸ The comparative regularity of the *Dronaparvan* in this respect is obvious and no doubt linked with its relatively late date. E. D. Kulkarni's studies show that not only was sandhi originally more flexible—although a growing aversion to forms of sandhi not sanctioned by Pāṇini's grammar is apparent—but also that hiatus came to be viewed with disfavour and was removed by various expedients;⁹ significantly he comments that the different portions of the Critical Text as well as the Critical Apparatus present the same phenomenon.

Veena Bhatnagar has listed all the instances of double sandhi that she found in the text, totalling 303 in all; this is a smaller figure than is often implied, but there is inevitably a subjective element to their identification, as comparison with the instances listed in the Critical Notes to some of the *parvans* confirms.¹⁰ Those that she lists are fairly evenly distributed on the whole, with two or fewer in the shortest books (the *Sauptika*, *Strī*, *Mausala*, *Mahāprasthānika* and *Svargārohāna parvans*), the highest frequency otherwise being in the *Karṇa* and *Anuśāsana*

⁷ Originally prepared as part of his introduction to the *Sabhāparvan*, this material was instead published as an article (1943–44).

⁸ De 1958. The figures have been emended in line with the Critical Note—by De himself—on 7.5.8a, which also notes the occurrence of hiatus at 1.1.40c, 33.18b, 76.18c and 5.149.29cd; the last is an instance of the hiatus between *pādas* (found also, for example, at 7.171.34cd, 12.99.7ab, 214.11cd and 271.25cd) which may be a relic of the division of the *śloka* into four *pādas* rather than two lines.

⁹ Kulkarni 1944.

¹⁰ Bhatnagar 1973. As an example of varying identification, the Critical Notes to the *Śāntiparvan* add to the 48 instances that Bhatnagar lists another five examples at 12.61.17b, 185.3², 306.19c, 101d (making a cluster of 4 in 12.306) and 342.15b.

parvans and the lowest in the *Udyogaparvan*, followed by the *Sabhā*, *Virāṭa* and *Āśvamedhika parvans*; there does not seem to be any real correlation with the usual estimates of the relative dating of different books, although it is interesting to note that a cluster of five instances occurs in 1.115. Other forms of irregular sandhi are also found, such as the elision of initial *ā*, usually of *ātman* (for example, instances in the *Udyogaparvan* comprise *manyase* "tmānam 103.19a, *yo* "tmānam 110.20b, *so* "tmānam 149.42b, *manyate* "tmānam 149.42d, *santo* "tmabalasamstavam 166.5b, and with another word *sambhṛto* "śramavāsinā 164.6b).

The most extensive collections of data concerning non-*Pāṇinian* forms in the Critical Edition of the *Mahābhārata* are those compiled by Kulkarni.¹¹ These are based only on those *parvans* that had appeared by the time that he started this series of articles (the *Ādi*, *Āranyaka*, *Virāṭa* and *Udyoga parvans*) but that is a large enough sample to give an adequate general picture, though not to assess the detailed situation in each book. Equally, he simply lists all occurrences of the forms but it is possible to make totals from his lists and thus to some extent to study distribution or frequency (including occurrences in * passages, which he also lists). For example, from his data on the negative particles it is evident that in the books studied *mā* is used to a significant extent with other verbal forms than the unaugmented aorist; among these it occurs considerably more often with the imperative than with the optative or the augmented aorist (63 times with imperatives in the text of these books, 23 times with optatives and 18 times with the augmented aorist).¹² With regard to the participles, Kulkarni's data bear out the pattern of confusion of voice that has

¹¹ Kulkarni 1943a, 1943b, 1943–44, 1944, 1950–51; also, in addition to those noted separately below, 1940–41, 1946, 1947, 1969. To Kulkarni's main series is to be added Gokhale 1957.

¹² The distribution of these instances between the books studied is also of interest. There are 18 instances of *mā* with the imperative in the *Ādiparvan* (and 12 in * passages), 23 in the *Āranyakaparvan* (and 4 in * passages), 2 in the *Virāṭaparvan* (and 7 in * passages), and 20 in the *Udyogaparvan* (and 1 in a * passage); there are 5 instances of *mā* with the optative in the *Ādiparvan*, 7 in the *Āranyakaparvan* (and 1 in a * passage), 3 in the *Virāṭaparvan* (and 4 in * passages), and 8 in the *Udyogaparvan* (and 1 in a * passage); there are 4 instances of *mā* with the augmented aorist in the *Ādiparvan*, 6 in the *Āranyakaparvan*, 2 in the *Virāṭaparvan* (and 1 in a * passage), and 6 in the *Udyogaparvan*. The low figures for the *Virāṭaparvan* clearly point to a stylistic difference, even when account is taken of its being shorter. Inevitably in this section data will be presented in several forms, since they are drawn from various sources; however the lengths of each *parvan* in terms of both *adhyāyas* and of verses were given in the outline of the Critical Edition in the second chapter and so mere numerical totals can be checked against these.

commonly been noted as a feature of epic Sanskrit but more specifically suggest that, in the case of the present participle, middle forms increase in frequency compared with active forms, against the trend in other forms of the verb, and that use of active endings with passive participles is not as rare as elsewhere. Similarly, Kulkarni notes the occasional use of *sma* with a wide variety of tenses, usually with no real meaning and primarily for metrical reasons. However, there are a certain number of instances of its use with the present tense to express a continuing past—9 in the *Ādiparvan* (and 3 in * passages), 25 in the *Āranyakāparvan*, 3 in the *Virāṭaparvan* and 14 in the *Udyogaparvan* (and 2 in * passages)—but these are not quite as frequent as its use with the present without alteration of meaning, of which there are 20 instances in the *Ādiparvan* (and 5 in * passages), 34 in the *Āranyakāparvan* (and 3 in * passages), 12 in the *Virāṭaparvan* (and 5 in * passages) and 11 in the *Udyogaparvan* (and 3 in * passages).

Elsewhere Kulkarni examines case variation in the *Ādiparvan* on the basis of use of the dative.¹³ He looks at instances firstly of interchange between dative and nominative, under sub-headings of an adjective used either with the nominative subject or the dative object (for example at 1.5.18, 6.9, 96.8, 216.3), stylistic changes owing to analogical disturbance (1.16.40 *striyai/striyah*), interchange of dative and nominative adjectives (1.99.26), dative of purpose as a nominative adjective agreeing thus with the subject (1.143.6, 1.144.8, 1.155.40); secondly, of interchange between dative and accusative, with sub-headings of dative object as the accusative object (1.13.1, 47.3, 58.3, 78.38, 123.25, 124.5, 154.11, 168.12, 189.2, 190.3), an indeclinable with case termination used for the dative of purpose (1.16.8, 94.59, 123.35, 123.77, 137.3, 189.48, 201.22, 221.17), the same idea expressed with a *karmapravacanīya* (1.33.9, 48.17), dative of time as accusative of time (1.45.16), dative of purpose as accusative of destination (1.80.25, 96.46), dative of purpose as accusative of time (1.80.27); thirdly, interchange of dative and instrumental, in terms of stylistic change owing to analogical disturbance (1.3.117, 6.9, 96.8, 104.3) and dative of purpose used as instrumental of manner (1.18.4.5, 221.14); fourthly, interchange of dative and ablative, with the dative of interest used as ablative of separation (1.95.59), and also one doubtful instance (1.152.16, *tasmai/tasmād*); fifthly, interchange of dative and genitive, under the headings of genitive object used for dative

¹³ Kulkarni 1939.

object with verbs like *vādā* (1.3.163, 30.7.8, 50.8, 76.29, 77.20, 79.29, 88.10, 98.29, 103.12, 123.2, 158.40, 163.5, 189.44, 213.49), genitive object used for dative object with verbs of telling, speaking etc. (1.3.40, 38.16, 39.33, 41.29, 46.36, 70.16, 89.37, 101.23, 122.20, 124.33, 184.3, 210.12), genitive object used for dative object with verbs of sending, getting, etc. (1.1.84, 38.11, 39.23, 25, 68.10, 152.16, 158.11), genitive of possession used for dative of relation (1.45.5, 65.18, 88.1, 100.17, 22), genitive object used for dative object with *prasādam vīkr* (1.67.31), genitive object used for dative object with verbs having causal forms (1.120.15, 189.2); and sixthly, interchange of dative and locative, under the headings of stylistic change owing to the influence of analogical disturbance (1.3.117, 57.12), indeclinables with case termination as dative of purpose (1.16.8, 48.17, 112.4, 115.12, 201.5), influence of the same verb on both the cases concerned (1.49.4 *tasmai/tasmin*), inclusive dative object used as the selective locative (1.77.20, 189.2), dative object as locative of destination (1.78.38, 96.20, 225.13), and dative of purpose as locative of occasion (1.88.18). Whatever may be thought about the individual instances cited and even the categories used, the extent to which the genitive is becoming the all-purpose oblique case is already apparent from these data. This is confirmed elsewhere, for example in the *Udyogaparvan*, where instances of genitive for ablative are found at 8.22, 50.58, 82.17, 100.6 and 175.26; K. Meenakshi regards this use of the genitive for ablative as the only epic use of the genitive which falls outside Pāṇini's rules and notes that it is quite common in Middle Indo-Aryan, where the dative and ablative have been replaced by the genitive.¹⁴

Morphology has been little studied but there are not infrequent instances of transfer of stem and of irregular declension in nominal declension, as well as of transfer of stem, irregular conjugation and change of voice in the verbal system. In the absence of anything approaching a statistical survey it is difficult to make any significant deductions from the material. However, a few random examples of the types of forms occurring include transfer of -ṛ stem to -ā (e.g. *svasā*, 6.112.3b and 7.48.1a) and—in the opposite direction from the normal trend—of -i to -in stem (e.g. *padātī ca padātinam*, 7.144.34b), irregular declension in *tāpayantī* as accusative dual neuter (10.14.11b) and *yavīyasah* for *yavīyāmsah* (12.34.13d), frequent metrical shortening of final syllables in compounds (such as *mādrinandanah*, 9.14.12d),

¹⁴ Meenakshi 1991.

transfer of verbal stem (for example in *kurmī* at 5.180.27d, 7.161.4c etc., *mā kṛdhvam* 5.56.60d, *gānti* at 5.107.9c, *anudhyāti*, *abhidhyāmi* and *dhyāmi* at 1.224.31c, 5.60.21a and 5.172.14b respectively), irregularities of conjugation (e.g. *jāgarati* at 12.209.3d, *hanyati* at 13.122.11c) and change of voice, both *ātmanepada* for *parasmaipada* (e.g. *paśyāmahe* at 9.15.9a and *śuśruve* at 9.29.56c) and *parasmaipada* for *ātmanepada* (e.g. *ācakṣam* at 9.28.45a and *priyate* for *priyamānāya* at 12.136.183b). There are also an appreciable number of instances of irregularities in the formation or use of denominative and causative forms (for example, *ghaṭante* at 10.2.8d, *pravādyanta* at 12.53.4d, or *yāpyanti* and *yāpyatām* at 12.258.34cd, all with causative sense). It is also worth noting that a common motivation for such irregularities is metrical convenience, which is also the case with many Prakritisms, such as the use of *geha* instead of *grha*.¹⁵

Meenakshi has made a survey of the syntax of the *Sabbā* and *Udyoga parvans*, which gives examples of all the features examined but rarely indicates their relative frequency.¹⁶ Thus she provides a few examples of irregularities of number (singular for dual in *cakṣusā* at 5.15.18c and *pāṇinā* at 5.30.12d; plural for dual in *ajaikapādāhirbudhnyaiḥ* at 5.112.4a, where the reading is less than certain and contrast the use of the nominative singular at 1.60.2c, 114.57c and 12.201.18c) and only their small number indicates that this is in fact very rare. Similarly, irregularities of concord between substantive and attribute are extremely rare, the only instance cited from these two *parvans* being *śriyam tān aśnuvīmahi* at 5.70.42d (however, from elsewhere, can be cited, for example, an instance of plural predicate for a dual subject at 6.68.9d). No irregularities in the use of the nominative are noted, although several instances of predicative nominatives are given, as well as of the essentially similar enumerative nominative (for example, *trayah kileme adhana bhavanti dāsah śisyas cāsvatantrā ca nārī*, 2.63.1ab). The accusative of the goal with verbs of motion is quite a frequent idiom, as are the accusative to express duration of time (for example,

¹⁵ This is a point already made by Hopkins (1901a: 263). In the first 9 *parvans* the distribution of *geha* is quite variable: 1.104.4a, 132.17a, 2.19.49a (v.l. 61.1a), 63.22a, 3.2.52c, 66.14a, 287.6d, 7c, 13c, 288.5c, 289.22a, 4.2.26a, 5.3.7a, 35.12c, 36.32c, 37.26a, 38.3b, 131.14a, 6.28.41c, 8.29.36a and 30.46c, 49a (it also occurs for example at 12.258.25d and 322.24b).

¹⁶ Meenakshi 1983. This is a revised version of her Poona thesis, which also studies the syntax of the *Ayodhyā* and *Yuddha kāṇḍas* of the *Rāmāyaṇa* (Nirnayasagar edition). Except where indicated, much of the next few paragraphs is drawn from this work, supplemented and corrected by my own reading of the text.

dīrghakālam sahośitāḥ, 5.71.6b), cognate accusatives and adverbial accusatives. A double accusative with verbs of speaking and of knowing and with causative verbs occurs quite regularly. The following prepositions or equivalents are construed with the accusative: *prati*, *rte*, *vinā*, *adhah*, *uddiśya* and *puraskṛtya*. So too the interjection *dhik* regularly governs the accusative. Meenakshi notes one instance each of the accusative used in place of the ablative (*ānayisyāmahe grhān*, 5.191.7f) and the accusative used for the locative (*na hi yuddham praśāmsanti sarvāvastham arīḍama*, 5.57.2cd).

The sociative sense of the instrumental is always indicated by the addition of *saha*, *sārdham* or the like, whereas the causal instrumental is unmarked. A number of instrumental forms are used adverbially: *ānupūrvyena*, *dīstyā*, *prāyena*, *yaugapatyena*, *vistareṇa*, *śanaiḥ*, *samāsenā* and *sahasā*. The prepositional forms *vinā*, *alam* and *rte* are also construed with the instrumental as well as the accusative (and the ablative in the case of *rte*). The instrumental is commonly used with the adjectives *sama*, *samāna* and *tulya* indicating likeness (more commonly than the genitive). The instrumental is also used to indicate the time required for an action or event (for example, *kartum yasya na śakyeta kṣayo varṣasatair api*, 2.30.7cd) and rarely to indicate the time of an action (*sa bhavān pusyayogena muhūrtena jayena ca | kauraveyān prayātvāśu*, 5.6.17abc). The instrumental of comparison, which is of limited frequency in the Brāhmaṇas, has become quite common in the *Mahābhārata*, being used with words such as *vara* and *adhika* expressing superiority as well as with comparatives and superlatives; there are, for example, ten instances in the *Udyogaparvan* (5.6.3, 55.14, 88.42, 98.9, 103.14, 126.9, 137.6, 164.12, 166.20 and 173.1). The instrumental absolute is an occasional idiom.¹⁷

The dative is used in an entirely regular fashion to denote the recipient with verbs of giving, sending or showing and the person addressed with verbs of speaking, but its most frequent usage is the dative of purpose or aim. The dative is also used after certain expressions of greeting (*namāḥ*, *bhadram*, *svasti* and *svāgatam*) and occasionally after *alam* and the adjectives *paryāpta* and *samartha* in the sense of being competent to do something (for example, *alam eva śamāyāsmi tathā yuddhāya*, 5.31.23ab). Less frequent still are its use with verbs

¹⁷ According to Meenakshi, ‘The absolute use of instrumental is not common in the Vedic and in the Classical Sanskrit. In the *Mahābhārata* and in Buddhist Sanskrit, it is not rare’ (1983: 10–11).

such as $\sqrt{spṛh}$, $\sqrt{smṛ}$ and \sqrt{druh} to denote the person towards whom the emotion is directed and with *cira* or sometimes other words to denote an indefinite future period (for example, *dīkṣitam cirarātrāya*, 5.154.4c). The ablative is the normal case to express the starting point with verbs of motion, separation or release, the source of information with verbs of hearing or learning, the cause with verbs of fearing, and the origin with verbs meaning ‘to be born’ or ‘to arise’, as well as more generally to express cause or motive (including, for example, *daiwāt* and *balāt*, which have become almost adverbial). The ablative of comparison is a concurrent idiom with the instrumental of comparison; the ablative is also used in a similar manner with *anya* to express difference and with *ati* + \sqrt{ric} . It can also be used to express distance away (for example, *yojanād dadṛśe*, 2.22.21c) or time elapsed. Certain adverbs and prepositions are regularly construed with the ablative: *ā*, *anantaram*, *antareṇa* (also genitive), *rte* (also accusative and instrumental), *kṛte* (also genitive), *prabhṛti*, *param*, *purā*, *prāk* and *bahir*.

As is clear from Kulkarni’s data from the *Ādiparvan*, noted above, the genitive is already taking over the functions of other cases, especially the dative, at least in later parts of the *Mahābhārata*. It still, of course, retains its original possessive sense, as well as its use to denote the object of agent or action nouns. It is much more commonly used than either the instrumental or the ablative of comparison with *vara*, *mukhya* and similar words and with superlatives. However, the genitive absolute is less frequent than the locative absolute and is limited in the main to expressing the attendant circumstance (though more widely than the disregard or contempt allowed for in Pāṇini 2.3.38). The genitive is also used with \sqrt{jan} but less commonly than either the ablative or instrumental (and the locative even less often), and its use with adjectives such as *sama* and *tulya* is less frequent than that of the instrumental. The locative of place is found especially in association with verbs of living, entering, sitting and falling, while the locative expressing the time of the action is particularly common, and not infrequently is generalised to express the attendant circumstances. The locative of place is an occasional substitute for the accusative to express the destination with verbs of motion, and the locative may sometimes replace the dative of purpose. Its main use is in the locative absolute, which occurs generally.

The usage of the personal pronouns is basically regular, although there are very occasional instances of the natural irregularity of *bhavān* being used with a verb in the second person (for example, *bhavān* . . .

manyethās tat kuryāḥ purusottama, 5.78.4). It is interesting to note that, among those features which are differentially distributed between the recensions, there is a definite tendency for the Southern Recension in general, and the Malayālam manuscripts in particular, to prefer the forms *mā* and *tvā* for the accusative singular of the first and second person pronouns, whereas the Northern Recension shows a preference for *mām* and *tvām*, in those places where there is manuscript variation.¹⁸ The genitive of the personal pronouns is more frequently used to express possession than the adjectival forms *māmaka*, *madiya* and the like. The usage of the demonstrative and interrogative pronouns is also grammatically regular, although it may be noted that there are occasional instances of the forms *katara* (e.g. 5.65.5d) and *katama* (e.g. 5.43.24c). The indefinite use of the interrogative pronoun in combination with *cit*, *cana* or *api* is supplemented by the occasional use of the plural of *eka*. The relative pronoun may be generalised by being repeated, by the addition of the interrogative plus *cit* or *cana*, or by the correlative use of *yah* . . . *sah*. The forms *yat*, *yena* and *yasmāt* are also used as conjunctions in a causal sense.

Andries Breunis, in his study of the nominal sentence, has looked at small samples from both the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyana* among other texts.¹⁹ He notes that the use of the pronoun *ya-* in epic and even classical Sanskrit does not change essentially in comparison with Brāhmaṇa prose, with not infrequent use of *ya-* with a *nominativus pendens* and occasional use in combination with another pronoun (such as *ye te striyau dhātā vidhātā ca* at 1.3.172). He also points out that the form made from a past participle passive with the suffix *-vat* is an innovation compared with the language of the Brāhmaṇas but that it never became widely used (identifying around 35 in his *Mahābhārata* sample but only one in the *Rāmāyana* sample). The true perfect participle active also may function as a finite verb, although Breunis notes that all the instances met with are from *vsthā* or *vi* (with five instances in his *Mahābhārata* sample). The periphrastic future is more frequent in his *Mahābhārata* sample (17 instances of *bhavitā* and one of *drastā*) than in the *Rāmāyana* (one instance of *drastā*). He found 260

¹⁸ See Kulkarni 1950.

¹⁹ Andries Breunis 1990. The sample for the *Mahābhārata* comprises 1.1, 3–44, 107, 220–1 and 225; this is hardly a representative sample, being drawn from the *Ādiśāvan* only and some of it from particularly late parts of that book; however, it is supplemented in chapter 4 by the excerpts contained in Böhtlingk's *Chrestomathie* (1909) and in chapter 5 by 1.98–99 and 112–13. The sample for the *Rāmāyana* comprises 3.1–3 and 24, again from one book and probably later parts of it.

instances of nominal sentences with a past participle passive as the predicate (using 138 different forms) in his *Mahābhārata* sample, which he estimates as being twice as long as his *Rāmāyaṇa* sample, in which the number was 77 (using 50 different forms); thus the frequency in the *Mahābhārata* sample is more than half as much again as in the *Rāmāyaṇa* sample. Similarly, the construction where $\sqrt{v}as$ or $\sqrt{v}bhū$ is placed immediately after the past participle passive was much commoner in the *Mahābhārata* sample (34 instances) than in the *Rāmāyaṇa* sample (9 instances), even allowing for the difference in length of the samples. Most of these points will be amplified in the next few paragraphs.

The present tense is sometimes used as the tense of narration and so has a general past sense, although instances are not always distinguishable from use of the present to indicate habitual action (for example, *prayacchāmaḥ karān sarve* at 2.34.12c probably has a past sense but could be understood as a continuous present). More often, such use is marked by the addition of the particle *sma* (e.g. 2.30.49, 31.25, 5.71.19, 82.8) or *purā* (e.g. 2.38.29, 62.6, 5.53.6, 98.3), but the present sense is usually retained even where *sma* is added, as is shown by Kulkarni's data, noted above. The present may also be used in situations where the action is in the immediate future by a natural prolepsis (e.g. 2.16.9, 64.11, 5.9.42), as also in the protasis of a conditional sentence; however these usages are relatively infrequent.

With regard to the employment of the past tenses, it may be noted that in the *Udyogaparvan* and probably elsewhere the imperfect is more frequent than the perfect, while the aorist is less frequent than the other two past tenses. Not infrequently two or sometimes all three tenses are used in the same context; rarely a past tense is used alongside a historic present (for example, *sabhāyām ṛṣayas tasyām pāṇḍavaiḥ saha āsate | āsām cakrur narendrāś ca*, 2.4.7abc). The restrictions placed on the use of the first person of the perfect by Pāṇini 3.2.115 are not observed. There are occasional instances of optative forms used in the sense of past indicatives, which have presumably therefore been interpreted as aorist forms; S. M. Katre has noted instances from *vi* 'to go': *iyāt* at 1.122.47b, 2.67.5d and 15d, 3.58.7b (*anviyāt*) and 5.19.12d, and *iyām* at 3.23.12c.²⁰ The use of the unaugmented aorist (injunctive) with *mā*, occasionally *mā sma*, is the normal means to express a prohibition, although use of the imperative with *mā* or

²⁰ S. M. Katre 1937, 1938–39, and 1939.

mā sma is not uncommon and the optative is also occasionally used. Also occasional instances of unaugmented forms with preterite sense are found (for example *vācayat* at 12.40.17b) and in many other instances are found as variants which may well be more original than the text adopted.

The usage of the simple future is basically regular, although there is considerable variation from the classical pattern in the occurrence of *set* and *anit* forms. The periphrastic future is used where the action will take place at a definite future time, often marked by temporal adverbs such as *prātah*, *śvah* and the like, or where stress is laid on the certainty of the action occurring, as in certain conditional sentences and in oaths. However, the distinction is far from absolute and both simple and periphrastic future may occur together (for example at 2.68.26 and 8.34.8). Indeed, the complete survey of the use in the *Mahābhārata* of the periphrastic future in oaths undertaken by Minoru Hara reveals that there are a substantial number of counter examples showing use of the simple future, while also demonstrating the frequency in such contexts of temporal adverbs or other time-indicating phrases (for example, *anastamgata āditye* at 7.95.10c and *sūryodaye* at 5.160.13a).²¹ For the first or second person either a form from *vas* or the appropriate personal pronoun is always added, or sometimes both (for example, *kartārah sma vayam* at 7.16.14c). Optative and future forms occur together with the same meaning at 9.18.15–22.

The imperative is standardly used to express commands, wishes and benedictions, with the imperative of the passive commonly used to express a request, as in the classical language. The optative or potential mood is used to express wishes and exhortations, possibilities and doubts, and in hypothetical situations (especially, therefore, in conditional sentences)—again in a regular manner. The conditional is relatively infrequent, being virtually confined to expressing unreal, because past, conditions (for example, *imāṇ cet pūrvāṇ kitavo 'glahīsyad īśo 'bhavisyad aparājītātmā*, 2.63.18cd), but exceptionally it may be used with a future sense, as for example at 5.47, where the refrain *yadā dhārtarāstro 'nvatapsyat* (12d, 14d, 15d, 19d, etc.) is co-ordinated with periphrastic futures.

The present participle is employed to indicate the contemporaneity of the action denoted with that of the main verb or to denote a state or condition, where a particular idiom is the use of *sthā* or *ās* with

²¹ Hara 1987–88.

a present participle to denote a habitual action (for example, *kṣīram pibantas tiṣṭhanti bhūñjānāḥ sālitāṇḍulān* at 2.54.25cd). The future participle is infrequent but its use is regular, expressing either simple futurity or intention. Both the past participle passive and the past participle active (p.p.p. + -vat) often function as the verbal element of a sentence, with either a personal pronoun or a form of $\sqrt{v}as$ or $\sqrt{v}bhū$ added to indicate anything other than the third person; however, the past participle passive is significantly commoner in an adjectival usage. The past participle active is an innovation from the language of the Brāhmaṇas and appears to be particularly a characteristic of the language of the *Mahābhārata*, since instances are much more frequent than in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, while in the classical language it is little used; its frequency varies and there are, for example, 81 instances of the nominative singular used as the verbal element in the *Ādiparvan* (1.13 per 100 verses) but only 8 in the *Virāṭaparvan* (0.44 per 100 verses). Moreover, there is a striking concentration of instances in some shorter units; for example, the *Anukramanīparvan* (1.1) contains 10 instances in 210 verses (4.76 per 100 verses), the *Haranahārīkāparvan* (1.213) contains 5 instances in 82 verses (6.1 per 100) and the *Arghābhīharāṇaparvan* (2.33–36) contains 7 instances in 99 verses (7.07 per 100). The true perfect participle active is relatively infrequent (the majority of instances being *jagmivān* and its compounded forms) but also functions as the verbal element. Occasional instances are found of the perfect participle active without reduplication and compounded with its object, for example *pratyakṣadarśvān* 1.54.18b, *dharmaṛthadarśvān* 1.133.18d, and *dharmaḍarśvān* 1.146.15d (the sole example of such a form in the *Rāmāyaṇa* is *apriyaśamsiān* at 2.16.60d).

The gerundive is used in an entirely regular manner to express what should or ought to be done, with the slight extension, in conjunction usually with *avaśyam*, of expressing what needs to be done (for example, *avaśyam cāpi gantavyā tuyā dūravatī purī*, 2.42.49cd). The absolute (gerund) is construed with the logical subject of a sentence quite commonly rather than the grammatical subject in passive constructions; the only irregularities connected with it are in terms of its formation. Besides the relevant part of Kulkarni's article on non-finite forms, there is an earlier one on absolutives by M. A. Mehendale based on the *Virāṭaparvan* only.²² These show that irregular compounded

²² Mehendale 1939.

absolutives (with *-tvā* for *-ya*) are less frequent than irregular uncompounded absolutives (with *-ya* for *-tvā*). The actual figures for irregular compounded forms are 15 in the *Ādiparvan* (and 4 in * passages), 14 in the *Āranyakaparvan* (and 1 in a * passage), 6 in the *Virāṭaparvan* (and 7 in * passages) and 9 in the *Udyogaparvan* (and 3 in * passages), while for irregular uncompounded forms the totals are 23 in the *Ādiparvan* (and 11 in * passages), 49 in the *Āranyakaparvan* (and 2 in * passages), 2 in the *Virāṭaparvan* (and 4 in * passages) and 17 in the *Udyogaparvan* (and 2 in * passages). However, the latter totals conceal the fact that only a limited number of forms are common, since *grhya* (34 times) and *usya* (21 times) together constitute well over half the total of 91 instances in the text of these books. Another well defined feature is the occurrence of *avamanya*, found 18 times in these books but predominantly (12 times) in the *Āranyakaparvan* (with the Southern manuscripts regularly correcting to *avamatya*). In an article on the usage of the absolute, Gonda noted occasional examples from the *Mahābhārata*, of which the commonest is that where it agrees with the logical rather than grammatical subject of the sentence (examples he gives occur at 1.11.10, 41.9, 182.12 and 3.59.10) but he made no attempt to indicate frequency or whether such usage was typical of particular texts.²³

The infinitive is usually employed to express the purpose of an action, in which use it is equivalent to a dative of purpose. It also occurs not infrequently in dependence on verbs expressing the meaning of ability or suitability (*√śak*, *√varh*, *ut* + *√sah*) or on various adverbs or adjectives with similar meanings (*alam*, *parākrānta*, *paryāpta*, *yukta*, *samarha*), where the dative of an equivalent noun is an alternative construction. However, its use with a dative sense following *kāla* is rare (an example is *kālo gantum naraśreṣṭha* at 5.114.19c). As shown by Kulkarni's material, there is occasional use of *set* for *anīt* forms and vice versa in the formation of the infinitive (30 in total in the *Ādi*, *Āranyaka*, *Virāṭa* and *Udyoga parvans*), as well as a few instances of the simple verb for the causative and causative for simple (9 in all in the *Ādi*, *Āranyaka*, *Virāṭa* and *Udyoga parvans*). Infinitives may also be compounded with *kāma* (rarely *manas*) to form what is in effect a pseudo-desiderative participle.

The frequency of the secondary conjugations, particularly deside-

²³ Gonda 1967.

ratives and intensives, shows a similar pattern of variability to that found in the *Rāmāyaṇa*.²⁴ In the *Sabhāparvan* the frequency of intensives is extremely low (just two forms, giving an average of 0.08 in every 100 verses) but the overall frequency of desiderative forms is quite high (an average of 2.56 in every 100 verses); however, there is a particularly high proportion of desideratives in the *Jarāsandhāparvan* (2.18–22, with 6.15 per 100 verses) and fairly high in the adjacent *Mantraparvan* (2.12–17, with 4.05 per 100 verses), *Digvijayaparvan* (2.23–29, with 5.23 per 100 verses) and *Rājasūyaparvan* (2.30–32, with 3.09 per 100 verses) in contrast to the remainder of the *Sabhāparvan* (1.6 per 100 verses). In the *Bhagavadgītā* the frequency of desiderative forms is almost twice that found in the rest of the *Bhīṣmaparvan* (2.00 per 100 verses against 1.10) and the frequency of intensive forms is exactly twice as great (0.26 per 100 verses against 0.13), while the figures for the *Āśvamedhikaparvan* are comparable to those for the *Bhagavadgītā* (2.03 desideratives and 0.59 intensives per 100 verses) and there is no great distinction between the *Anugītā* (1.74 desideratives and 0.82 intensives per 100 verses) and the rest of the *Āśvamedhikaparvan*. In the *Śalyaparvan* the frequency of desideratives (2.19 per 100 verses) is increased by the frequent occurrence of forms from *√han* but the frequency of intensives (0.15 per 100 verses) is similar to that in the *Bhīṣmaparvan* as a whole.

The use of various particles is quite frequent. Emphasis is expressed by *nūnam*, *kila*, *khalu*, *nāma*, *eva*, *evam*, *kāmam*, *jātu* (usually as *na . . . jātu*), *vai* and *ha*, although *ha* is often devoid of any real emphasis, especially when occurring at the end of a line following a perfect. The usage of the negative particle *na* does not show any significant variation from standard usage, while the usage of the prohibitive *mā* has already been covered. In questions *nanu* is used to indicate that a positive answer is anticipated and *utāho* to indicate the opposite. Exclamations include the all-purpose *aho*, *dīstyā* to express pleasure, *dhik* to express disapproval or condemnation, *bata* to express surprise, and *hā* to express sorrow. The main connective particles are *atha*, *api*, *uta*, *ca*, *tathā*, *tu*, *vā* (also *atha vā*, *yadi vā*) and *hi*. The conditional particles are *yadi* and *cet* (more often used with *na*, but also occurring in the combinations *yadi cet* and *atha cet*).

²⁴ In reckoning totals of desiderative forms *√kāṅkṣ*, *√bhakṣ*, *√bhikṣ* and *mokṣa* (with *mokṣin*, etc.) have been omitted, since the evidence suggests that they were no longer regarded as such.

Statistics on the frequency of particles and adverbs in the *Sabhāparvan* and in the main prose passages in the text compiled by Barend van Nooten show that in the prose passages the commonest particles are *iti*, *ca* and *na*, which together account for 64% of all occurrences of particles, whereas in the *Sabhāparvan* the same percentage is provided by *ca*, *na*, *eva*, *tu*, *tathā*, *hi* and *tatas*, but that the overall frequency in both prose and verse is identical (0.138% or one particle in every 72 words).²⁵ However, coupled particles (*api ca*, *api vā*, *api hi*, *ity eva*, *eva ca*, *eva tu*, *cāpi*, *caiva*, *tv eva*, *atha vā*) are found almost exclusively in the verse and there is regularly a degree of semantic redundancy, consonant with their use for metrical reasons.

The use of frequent vocatives is a typical feature of the *Mahābhārata*, which can be considered as both a linguistic and stylistic feature, and an extensive survey of their occurrence in the *Āranyakaparvan* has been made by Kulkarni.²⁶ The categories into which he divides them are not particularly helpful; however, he himself notes the point that many of the terms in his miscellaneous category are easily transferable from one person to another and this can readily be verified from the complete listing that he gives of the vocatives occurring along with the individuals to whom they refer. For example, *anagha* is addressed to Amśumān, Arjuna, Indrajit, Karṇa, Kuntibhoja, Kṛṣṇa, Kauśika, Janamejaya, Duryodhana, Nala, Nārada, Bāla, Bhīma, Bhīṣma, Manu, Mārkandeya, Yudhiṣṭhira, Lomaśa, Vidura, Vaiśampāyana, Vyādha, Śaṅkara, Satyavān and Hanumān (though most often to Yudhiṣṭhira). Even with these more general epithets, though, their employment may be relatively specific; for example *dharmajña* is addressed mainly to Yudhiṣṭhira, with only one other individual so addressed more than once in the text, Vyādha (three times, at 3.204.8a, 205.4c and 11c). Patronymics and their equivalents are also often used with a limited reference: whereas *kaurava* and *kauravya* are addressed to several of the clan, *kurunandana* is rarely used for anyone but Yudhiṣṭhira and *kaunteya*, *pāṇḍava* and *pārtha*, though still most often addressed to Yudhiṣṭhira, are commonly used to Arjuna. The virtually complete interchangeability of epithets addressed to women (*anavadyāṅgi*, *anindite*, *kalyāṇi*, *bhadre*, *bhāmini*, *yaśasvini*, *varavarṇini*, *śubhānane*, *śubhe*, *subhage*, *suśroni*) is striking but in accordance with the epic portrait of them.

²⁵ van Nooten 1969.

²⁶ Kulkarni 1944–45.

The style of both the epics, and especially of the *Mahābhārata*, is relatively simple by comparison with classical Sanskrit literature, with few elaborate constructions or figures of speech. R. K. Sharma, in his monograph on figures of speech in the *Mahābhārata*, notes that similes are much the commonest figure and that the similes themselves are simple, usually referring to the Vedic gods, nature or items of material culture.²⁷ A particular feature of the *Mahābhārata* similes is the occasional use of several synonyms for the same object of comparison in the similes contained in compounds (such as *vajrāśanisamasparsa* 5.149.25c, 6.114.55a, 7.91.20a, 95.42a, 8.24.150c, also Rām. 3.25.6a and 6.33.29a). Many of the similes are constituents of a traditional stock and do not always fit perfectly the context in which they appear. Sharma also emphasises that the difference between living and petrified figures needs to be marked, giving as examples of such fossilised figures *puruṣarśabha* and *kamalapatrākṣa*; his point is more valid than his examples.

Indra is the commonest single object of comparison and similes involving the gods form a sizable group. The gods in general are a common *upamāna*, occurring in at least 81 passages in the three books surveyed by Sharma (the *Adi*, *Āranyaka* and *Bhīṣma parvans*), although some individual deities are much more frequent. Indra symbolises valour and prominence, and his battles with Vṛtra and other Asuras are commonly alluded to, but he can also symbolise protection as well, whereas his *vajra* is a symbol of terror and deadliness. Quite apart from terms such as *rājendra* and *mṛgendra* (which are better examples of fossilised figures), Indra appears in similes 247 times. Yama appears in at least 104 passages, often in highly stereotyped similes: *vyādītāsyam/vyāttānanam ivāntakam, danḍapāṇīm ivāntakam, kālāntakayamopama* and so on. Śiva appears in at least 14 similes, under his various names of Īśvara, Umāpati, Pinākin, Bhūtapatī, Maheśvara, Rudra, Śamkara, Śūlapāṇi and Śūlabhṛt, while Viṣṇu figures in 12, usually under that name, but also as Nārāyaṇa and Upendra; Brahmā, too, occurs in 12 similes. Garuḍa occurs nearly as often (10 similes). Kāma figures in 5 similes; Kubera appears in 4 similes, and the Caitraratha

²⁷ Sharma 1964. This is based on the *Ādi*, *Āranyaka* and *Bhīṣma parvans* only; however, his data on occurrences have been supplemented as appropriate from my own collecting of material in what follows. Also useful is S. L. Neveleva's study (1979). An earlier article by S. N. Gajendragadkar (1950) classifies them into nine categories (illustrative, sympathetic, imaginative, improbable and so on) but fails to illuminate the topic.

forest in a further 4; and the Aśvins also occur in 4 similes, as does Kārttikeya. Savitr is the *upamāna* in one simile (3.110.5), as are Mitra and Varuṇa (1.99.38). Various goddesses occur occasionally in similes: Śrī by that name 10 times and 3 times as Lakṣmī, Apsarases twice, Aditi, Umā, Ratī and Kinnarīs once each. Sacrificial objects occur as the *upamāna* in 14 similes, and one simile refers to the substitution of the *pūtika* for *soma* (3.36.32cd).

However, over half of all similes are drawn from the natural world. The sun is the next most frequent object of comparison after Indra, with 164 occurrences, many of which are stereotyped (e.g. *tarunāditya-samkāśa* at 1.214.31a, 3.293.6a, 5.81.17a and 13.80.20c). Other aspects of nature are also frequent; the third most frequent *upamāna* is indeed clouds with 158 occurrences, closely followed by fire with 155 (especially common in the compound *vibhāvasusamadyuti* and in *tūlarāśim wānalah* and *vidhumo 'gnir iwa jvalan*). Mountains, typifying immovability, feature in similes 110 times (just ahead of Yama, the second commonest deity in similes) and the moon, a symbol of charm and beauty, is found in 74 similes (including *pūrmacandranibhānanā* and the like), while the wind, as a symbol of speed, strength and force, and the ocean, symbolising expanse and depth, are also fairly common (occurring 63 and 62 times respectively). The planets (*graha*) and the stars are rather less frequent (18 and 12 occurrences respectively), while lightning, featuring in 9 similes, and the sky itself, with just seven similes, are even less common.

Among animal similes those based on elephants, snakes and lions are particularly frequent and several of the elephant similes are variants on the stereotyped *totrārdita iva dvipah*, ‘like an elephant stung by the goad’ (which is particularly frequent, however, in the *Dronaparvan*, not surveyed by Sharma). Elephants are an obvious symbol of strength and vitality, and they appear in 92 similes, while other common animals are the snake (69 similes), the lion (65 similes, including the frequent *śīnhah kṣudramṛgān iwa* and slight variants) and cattle (38 similes); less frequent are birds in general (17 occurrences), moths (12 occurrences), the tiger (11 times) and the *haṃsa* (9 times); the osprey, peacock, cuckoo, śyena, krauñca, baka, cakravāka, kāka and tittiri all occur only sporadically, although the four involving the osprey include *krośantīm kurārīm iwa* (1.6.11d, also 2.613* 1, 11.11.10b, Rām. 4.19.28 and 6.39.9b). Other animals are infrequent *upamānas*, with deer occurring five times, porcupines twice (but five times in the *Dronaparvan* at 48.6d, 106.45d, 141.20d, 143.16d and 150.51d), and monkeys,

camels, a wolf, a jackal, a dog, rabbits, frogs, a tortoise and a crab all occurring once each. Interestingly, a fairly common image among the cattle similes is of cattle troubled by cold, symbolising weakness or bewilderment (found for example at 6.45.58d, 113.7ab and 116.26d, also 7.7.17d, 96.26d, 101.47d, 130.6cd and 134.25d).²⁸ Apart from moths, the only other insects to appear are bees, found in 3 similes. Among plants the lotus is by far the most common *upamāna*, occurring 74 times (as often as the moon, another symbol of charm). Trees in general and cotton (occurring 19 times each, also the forest in general in 4 similes), the *sāla* tree (9 occurrences), the *tāla* and the *kiṁśuka* (8 occurrences each) are also found a significant number of times, with occasional similes involving the bamboo (4), the plantain (4) the *āsoka* (3), a creeper (4), fruit (4), flowers (3), *tila* (2), rice (2), reeds (2) and the *śālmalī*, *āsvattha*, *māsa*, *haridrā* and grass (once each); however, other books show differing frequencies, with for example the *kiṁśuka* occurring at least seven times in similes in the *Dronaparvan* (five of them in *puspitāva iwa kiṁsukau* at 7.14.23d, 47.4d, 71.17d, 111.22d and 137.9d). The earth itself only figures in similes 9 times in these books.

Gold is used as a symbol of brightness and purity rather than value and occurs 24 times, whereas silver and copper are used as *upamānas* five and six times only. Jewels are also used to symbolise brightness and those found in these books are: *vaidurya* (6 times), *sphatika* and pearls (twice each) and a general term, *ratna*, once. The relative lack of frequency of this group of *upamānas* strongly suggests that they were marginal to the culture.

Among terms for relatives, the father as a standard of affection is the most frequent and occurs 17 times; the mother and the *guru* appear much less often (in only 3 and 1 similes respectively). Various individuals—named sages or kings—also occur occasionally as *upamānas*. In addition, a few similes draw on situations of everyday life, on particular physical disabilities (for example, a dumb man or a lame one) or types (a coward or someone hungry), and on items of material culture (a cart, a ship, a swing, a mirror, clothes and so on). A few more use as the *upamāna* more abstract concepts, the *ātman*, *dharma*, the Vedas, the sense-organs and the like. Even fewer allude

²⁸ Sharma adds to the examples cited in 1964 in a later article (1988), and also compares 6.114.60 and 12.137.85 (with redvision of words). Otherwise, that article merely suggests the making of an 'Encyclopaedia of Poetic Formulae in the Great Epics and Purāṇas'.

to proverbial concepts: seeing golden trees when near to death (6.94.12) and seeing the city of the Gandharvas (that is, a mirage, which occurs three times).

Figures other than simple similes are much less frequent and tend to appear mainly at the more dramatic points of the narrative (where they may well be due to later poets' improvement of the text). Occasionally, similes are clustered into *mālopamā* but most of the limited number of examples are probably due to later embellishment, as their distribution suggests (the instances Sharma cites occur at 1.1.201–2, 83.7, 94.12, 97.4, 3.31.25, 50.2, 121.9, 226.10, 278.15 and 6.14.8). Poetic fancy or ascription, *utprekṣā*, is the next most frequent figure after simile but it is not always sharply distinct from simile when employed with nouns or adjectives, although *utprekṣā* of verbs is more so. Sharma identifies and quotes 18 examples with verbs (the majority of which occur in the *Ādiparvan*) and 15 with nouns and adjectives (one in the *Bhīṣmaparvan* and the rest equally divided between the *Ādi* and *Āranyaka parvans*). Metaphor or *rūpaka* tends more often to be in developed form (Sharma cites 21 examples from these three books, although some of these are not particularly elaborate). The briefer metaphors are often contained in compounds (for example, *tapodhana*, *vanamālinī*) and Sharma lists about 30 both compounded and otherwise, excluding the very stereotyped ones like *rājasimha* and *puruṣarṣabha*. Developed similes or metaphors, sometimes used in combination, are commoner in the battle books; a particularly common instance is the likening of the battlefield to a river or the sea, occurring a dozen or more times in the *Dronaparvan* (7.13.8–13, 15.42–43, etc.) Next in frequency come *atiśayokti* or hyperbole, with 15 examples altogether, and antithesis or *virodha* with at least 15 instances (and some ambiguous examples tentatively identified by Sharma, including three in the *Bhagavadgītā*). Other figures identified are only sporadic: *arthāpatti* (4 instances, at 1.69.15, 216.27, 219.25 and 6.19.13), *parisamkhya* (4 instances), *svabhāvokti*, *vyatireka* and *samdeha* (3 examples each), *visama*, *samāsokti* and *bhrāntimān* (2 examples each), and *tulyayogitā*, *vakrokti*, *sahokti* and *kātyalīṅga* (1 instance each). A few instances of these more elaborate figures of speech (*rūpaka*, *utprekṣā* and *atiśayokti*) are also stereotyped: *nimagnah śokasāgare*, *dārayann iwa medinīm* (with variants), *sendrair api surāsuraiḥ* and *trayāñām api lokānām* (cf. also *triṣu lokeṣu viśrutah*).

Among the *śabdālambikāras* alliteration, *anuprāsa*, can be classified into several types: the repetition of one consonant several times (16 instances), the single repetition of more than one consonant (16 in-

stances), the multiple repetition of more than one consonant (11 instances), repetition of a word in different grammatical relationships or *lāṭānuprāsa* (30 instances, some of which are repeated, such as *bhīmo bhīmaparākramah*), and *antyānuprāsa*, rhyme by common endings (at least 18 examples). The other major form of sound-play, *yamaka*, is not well developed in the *Mahābhārata* and Sharma identifies only 5 examples in the three books together. Even *śleṣa* is hardly present and the only examples that Sharma suggests are subsidiary to other figures. He does, however, identify some 15 instances of chiasmus, which is not recognised by the Sanskrit writers on poetics but does appear to be a device consciously used by certain of the poets who composed the *Mahābhārata*—it is noteworthy that all but three of Sharma's examples occur in the *Bhagavadgītā*.²⁹

One of the most obvious features of the Sanskrit epics is indeed (as some of the material in the last few paragraphs has already shown) that formulaic expressions constitute an important element of their expression; the proportion for the *Mahābhārata* is at least as great as in the *Rāmāyaṇa* where around one third of the *ślokas* contain significant formulaic material.³⁰ Although such forms of repetition are common to many, if not all, epic traditions, their roots in oral composition do not mean that the epics were always oral productions. It is clear that the traditional phraseology does not disappear immediately writing is employed and that the diction of a written work continues to show formulaic patterns. This no doubt accounts for the tendency to greater frequency of stock *pādas* in the later parts of both the epics. In the *Mahābhārata* the didactic element, comprising mainly the *Śānti* and *Anuśāsana parvans*, shows a distinctively different pattern from the

²⁹ However, Sharma himself does not make this point.

³⁰ In my article on stereotyped expressions (1970: 210–11) I calculated on the basis of the *Ayodhyā* to *Kiśkindhā kāṇḍas* that: ‘The average proportion [of stereotyped pādas] over all three kāṇḍas is about 1 in 22 or 4.5%, which means that one in eleven lines or one in five or six stanzas in fact contain a full pāda found in identical wording elsewhere. But if all instances where the verbal similarity is less exact and where the resemblance extends over less than a pāda are included, then between 30% and 40% of all śloka stanzas contain some stereotyped material.’ Though usually printed as two lines, in origin—and still to a large extent in the epics—the śloka actually consists of four pādas of eight syllables. In my usage, a formula consists of a full pāda that is completely fixed and a formulaic element is one where at least five syllables and two words are involved. Calculations on a different basis, such as those of Grintser (1974), give figures of around 80% of battle scenes consisting of formula and formulaic expressions and 40–50% of narrative chapters.

'battle books' (books 6–9) both in frequency and in type of formulaic expression.

There has been a resumption of discussion about the oral nature of the epics during the last thirty years approximately, to a large extent under the impetus of developments in Homeric studies. Sharma, for instance, consciously adopted C. M. Bowra's approach in a study of poetic formulæ occurring in the *Mahābhārata*, affirming that formulæ fixed by tradition are a substantial means of composing oral epic poetry.³¹ Russian Indologists in particular, beginning with Vassilkov, have been active in looking at the oral formulaic character of the epics and applying to the *Mahābhārata* the methods of Parry and Lord.³² One of the features that Vassilkov studies is the absence or an insignificant percentage of 'obligatory' enjambement, which is characteristic of literary style, whereas 'unperiodic' enjambement—where the thought of one grammatically complete verse is extended by new word groups in the next—is characteristic of oral composition (as examples he cites Mbh. 3.104.10–11 and 3.39.12–13). He emphasises the importance of thematic analysis and categorises the main themes as duels, ascetic exploits, requests made to story-tellers, reception of guests, descriptions of nature and the like; he makes the point that such themes—whether limited to one or two verses or developed at length—are often introduced by a formulaic expression. Vassilkov stresses that themes are traditionally linked in the mind of the singers and that 'discrepancies' and 'contradictions' in the text result from the limited variability in the expression of traditional ideas which is typical of the oral-poetic style. In another article, developing material in an article by then published by Grintser, Vassilkov examines in particular the function of 'supporting' words in the formation of formulaic endings of *pādas*, dividing them into the two categories of semantically positive words (such as a subject in the nominative) and semantically neutral words (commonly vocatives); the distinction is useful in some cases but in others obscures the fact that frequently the same word is involved, the only difference being the case, and thus the semantic load is similar.

Grintser's book, published soon after, shows the influence both of

³¹ Sharma 1966. His earlier monograph (1964), though including a final brief section on 'Techniques of Oral Poetry' which looks at formulæ, basically examined the stylistic features of the first three *parvas* according to *alāṃkārasāstra* classifications.

³² Vas[s]ilkov 1971 and 1973; see also de Jong 1975.

the Parry/Lord ideas and of the theories of Vladimir Propp.³³ The first part of the book, on the oral and written tradition in the ancient Indian epic, develops ideas in earlier articles on epic formulæ in the *Mahābhārata*, whereas the second part is a wide-ranging comparison of the *Mahābhārata* with epics from other cultures. Grintser classifies the formulæ into six basic types: attributive (such as *kuntīputro yudhiṣṭhirah, puruṣavyāghrah*), narrative (*kṛtvā pradakṣinam, vavarsa śaravarṣāni*), auxiliary (*etasminn eva kāle tu, śatāśo 'tha sahasraśah*), formulæ of direct speech (*nesyāmi/nayāmi yamasādanam, śrotum icchāmi*), maxims (*eṣa dharmah sanātanah, yato dharmaś tato jayah*) and similes (*pūrṇacandranibhānanā, dandapāṇir ivāntakah*); he also emphasises that there are two different sets of formulæ for the odd and even *pādas*.³⁴ He affirms that narrative sections, especially those describing battle scenes, contain an abundance of formulæ, whereas didactic passages have rather fewer. He notes that many formulæ are both synonymous and metrically equivalent, which means that the formulaic system of the *Mahābhārata* is not characterised by the simplicity of the Homeric system.

Pāda-length phrases comprising a personal name and an epithet are the commonest formulaic expressions; however, they are not used just at random but fulfil a definite narrative function.³⁵ The other main types are introductions and conclusions to speeches, various verbal formulæ expressing emotion or emphasis, certain descriptive and hyperbolic phrases, stock expressions for battle scenes, phrases of time, place and number, proverbs and similar expressions, and stereotyped similes. Such formulæ occur mainly in the second and fourth *pādas*, except those used after the end of speeches, which for obvious reasons usually occur in the first (or less commonly the third) *pāda*; the metrical pattern of the *śloka* means, however, that there are regularly different sets of formulæ for the odd *pādas* from those for the even *pādas*. It is also noteworthy how often a phrase or passage is repeated within a short space of its first occurrence. In several instances this results from the exact wording of a message being repeated or some event already described being narrated to another character. By contrast, the use of refrains, which occurs mainly in speeches, has a definite emphatic purpose, as has parallelism within

³³ Grintser 1974.

³⁴ This classification into six types partly coincides with but partly differs from that which I adopted in my 1970 article, in which I also made the point about variation in formulæ between the odd and even *pādas*.

³⁵ The next few paragraphs are based on my 1996 paper.

the verse, whereas another type of repetitiveness typifies certain diadic passages.

The use, then, of a personal name with an epithet is particularly common, for example *kuntiputra yudhiṣṭhirāḥ* and *dharmaṛājо yudhiṣṭhirah* (commonest in the *Ādiparvan*, where it occurs 31 times),³⁶ especially if a degree of alliteration or use of cognates is involved. Such standardisation of name and epithet—whether or not it involves alliteration or the use of cognate, as in *kṛṣnam akliṣṭakārīnam* and *bhīmo bhīmaparākramah*—is a good example of the tendency to evolve stock phrases which by themselves constitute a complete *pāda* or else complete the *pāda* after a word of two or three syllables; there is a whole stock of adjectives of varying lengths to permit this, although certain adjectives tend to be used with particular individuals, especially if alliteration is involved, and others are used widely. Thus *sātyakīḥ satyavikramah* for example occurs 28 times in the text, whereas *pratāpavān* is found following Jāmadagnya, Dronaputra, Dhṛṣṭadyumna, Bhagadatta, Bhāradvāja, Bhīmasena, Vāsudeva, Śiśupāla, Sahadeva and Sūtaputra. Equally, the occurrence of alternative forms to accommodate the oblique cases or the addition of a copula is not uncommon, as in *kṛṣṇam akliṣṭakārīnam* and *kṛṣṇenākliṣṭakarmanā*. In addition, certain pairings of names to form a complete *pāda* are common, most obviously *nakulāḥ sahadēvaś ca* but also, for example, *aśvatthāmā kṛpaś caiva* (found 12 times). Such formulaic *pādas* are naturally most common with the major figures but various of the *mahā-* compounds in particular are commonly used with the minor characters. The personal epithets in such *pādas* serve not only to facilitate the composition of the poem by providing the poet or reciter with ready-made building blocks but also to emphasise the aspect of the individual's character appropriate to the narrative.

Stereotyped *pādas* to introduce or to conclude speeches are also frequent, despite the use in the *Mahābhārata* of *extra metrum* announcements of the speaker, and various formulae are used according to the length of name (either of speaker or addressee) which is usually included within the *pāda*. The commonest is *idam vacanam abravīt*, followed by its shorter form - *vacanam abravīt*, where normally the name of either the speaker or the addressee completes the *pāda*; words of three

³⁶ I include under the typical form variants simply of case, person or number without further remark. Since details of the occurrence of such *pādas* may readily be ascertained from the *Pratīka-Index* (*Mahābhārata* 1967–72), references have only been given below when it was desired to draw attention to some feature of their distribution. As standardly, the term ‘* passages’ here denotes both * and App. I passages.

syllables are accommodated with x x x *idam abravīt* or—when required by sandhi or metre—x x x *vākyam abravīt*. Similarly, at the end of the speech, *tasya tad vacanam śrutvā* is very common (alternatively with the name of the speaker in the first three syllables), whereas the less frequent *iti tasya vacah śrutvā* occurs mainly in later passages. Other such formulæ that occur quite commonly include *etat te sarvam ākhyātam, satyam etad bravīmi te* and *hanta te kathayisyāmi*. John Smith has highlighted details of the distribution patterns of some phrases of this type: *ity uktah sa/ity uktā sā* ‘hardly appears at all in the first eleven books (except the mainly late Book 3), and is far below predictable frequency in Book 12, but occurs frequently in Books 13–5—this being the first sign we have had of a distinction between Books 12 and 13’, whereas *idam vacanam abravīt/abruwan* is most frequent in the narrative books and less so in the *Śānti* and *Anuśāsana parvans*.³⁷

The formulæ of emotion or emphasis include many expressions of surprise (such as *praharṣam atulam lebhe* and *vismayam paramam gatvā/gatah*) and hyperboles (for example, *nāham jīvitum utsahe*); while most are common to both epics, *tato halahalāśabdah* is commoner in the *Mahābhārata* than in the *Rāmāyaṇa*. Another phrase of this type is *sarvabhūtahite rataḥ*, occurring most often in the *Ādi* and *Śānti parvans*, which Norvin Hein has seen as favoured by the non-Bhārgava editors of the *Mahābhārata*.³⁸

Formulæ connected with battle are naturally very frequent in the battle books and just as naturally they often contain a strong element of hyperbole. One of the commonest is x x *devāsure yuddhe*; other formulæ describe the start of conflict (e.g. *amarṣavaśam āpannah, tataḥ pravavṛte yuddham, tumulo lomaharṣanah*), weapons and their employment (e.g. *athānyad dhanur ādāya, bāṇaiḥ/bhallaiḥ/śraiḥ samnavaparvibhiḥ, vivyādhā niśitaiḥ śraiḥ/bāṇaiḥ*) and the fall of warriors (e.g. *anayad yamasādanam*, found only in the text of books 6–9).

Common expressions of time are *etasminn antare x x, tasminn eva kāle tu* (contrast *etasmin kāla eva tu* which occurs only at Mbh. 3.94.11b in either epic), *kasya cit tv atha kālasya, daśa varṣasahasrāṇi* and *pāya kālasya paryayam* (occurring 13 times in the text only). There are also various somewhat stereotyped phrases for the ten directions (e.g. *vidravanti diśo daśa*) and the three worlds (*iha loke paratra ca, trailokyam sacarācaram,*

³⁷ Smith 1987: 610. He also notes the distribution of *itiḥāsam purātanam* on which I comment later.

³⁸ Hein 1986. See further at the end of this chapter (p. 157).

trisu lokeṣu x x), while common expressions of number or frequency include *ete cānye ca bahavah*, *tataḥ śatasahasrāṇi*, *prayutāṇy arbudāni ca*, *śataśo 'tha sahasraśah*; however, the alliteration in many of these is more a literary than an oral feature, which is to some extent confirmed by their distribution with, for example, *dīśāś ca vidiśāś caiva* most frequent in * passages (otherwise only at 13.151.27e).

Proverbial expressions are also quite frequent and a number also occur in the *Rāmāyaṇa* and in *Manu*, but a much smaller proportion is shared with other genres of Sanskrit literature. They are particularly frequent in the *Ādi*, *Udyoga* (specifically the *Prajāgaraparvan*, 5.33–41) and *Śānti parvans*, since they are most characteristic of expanded or didactic passages. Almost the first instance in the text is a particularly widespread one, *kālah pacati bhūtāni kālah samharati prajāḥ* at 1.1.188ab, to which many manuscripts add either immediately or a few lines later *kālah supteṣu jāgarti kālo hi duratikramah* at 61*; the whole verse recurs at 11.9* and the first line is found also in the *Mahābhāṣya* (vol. 2 p. 167) and in variant form at 3.57* 1, but the proverb is so instantly recognisable that either the first *pāda* or the last may occur separately (the first at 12.231.25a, 17.1.3a and 13 App. 15.2275 pr., as well as *Maitrī Upaniṣad* 6.15, and the fourth at 3.148.8d, 9.63.8d, 1 App. 95.30 post., and 2 App. 30.33 post., also Rām. 3.64.21d, 5.15.3d etc.). Immediately before this, at 1.1.186cd comes a variant of *daivam puruṣakāreṇa ko nivartitum arhati* (3.176.27ab and, with *utsahet*, 5.187.17cd). Occasionally it is the overall sentiment and the grammatical form which are more constant than the wording; a good example of this is the hyperbolical *yāvat sthāsyanti girayah* at 5.139.55a and 12.320.36a (followed at 12.320.36b by *sthāsyanti sāgarāḥ*, cf. also Rām. 1.2.35a), *yāvat sthāsyati medinī* at 6.94.18d and 12.226.38b (also 13 App. 14B. 58 post.), *yāvad bhūmir dharisyati* at 3.275.48d, 7.148.58d and 8.52.7d (also Rām. 6.88.53d), and other minor variants.

Proverbial or sententious expressions also occur—in many instances with slight variation of expression—at 1.38.9cd+3.30.42ab, 1.68.38 (and Hv. 66.20, Rām. 2.99.12, *Manu* 9.138 etc.), 1.69.22+12.156.26+13.23.14ab with 205*+13.74.29 (and *Viṣṇusmṛti* 8.36 etc.), 1.107.32+2.55.10+5.37.16+5.126.48, 1.113.35cd+3.289.18ab, 1.192.12ab+2.43.32ab+34ab+5.50.30cd, 2.43.32ab+7.110.1ab (and Rām. 1.57.21ab), 2.50.21+5.33.49+12.23.15+12.57.3+13.36.16, 2.72.8–9+5.34.78–79+5.141.44 (also *Pañcatantra* 3.184), 3.13.61+4.20.27, 3.82.85ab+87.7cd+13.88.14ab (and Rām. 2.99.13ad, *Viṣṇusmṛti* 85 etc.), 3.65.18 (also Rām. 5.14.26, *Hitopadeśa* ed. Johnson 3.29

etc.), 3.185.8+12.67.16 (and Rām. 2.61.21), 3.191.21+297.63, 3.198.54ef (and Rām. 3.44.10ab), 5.33.56ab (also Rām. 6.6.6ab, *Hitopadeśa* ed. Johnson 2.69), 5.35.27 (also Rām. 4.650*, *Manu* 8.99 etc.), 5.35.40 (also Rām. 4.29.40 and the second line only at Mbh. 12.166.23cd), 5.35.49 (and Rām. 7 App. 10.67–70, *Garuḍa Purāṇa* 1.115.52 etc.), 5.36.40 (and Rām. 4.29.40), 5.36.45+12.26.31, 5.36.56 (also Rām. 6.155*, *Pañcatantra* ed. Kosegarten 4.81 etc.), 5.37.14 (also Rām. 3.35.2+6.10.16 and *Pañcatantra* 2.171, and the second line at Mbh. 2.57.17cd and Rām. 3.35.2cd etc.), 5.40.6+13.38.25 (also *Garuḍa Purāṇa* 1.109.40 etc.), 5.58.26+63.15+122.53, 5.178.24+12.57.7+12.140.48 (also 1 App. 81.109–10, Rām. 2.454* 3–4 and *Pañcatantra* ed. Edgerton 1.120), 6.94.12 (cf. Rām. 3.45.33 etc.), 11.2.3+12.27.29+317.20+14.44.18 (also Rām. 2.98.16+7.51.10, *Garuḍa Purāṇa* 1.115.60, etc.), 12.8.16 (and Rām. 6.70.31), 12.8.18 (and Rām. 6.70.32, *Pañcatantra* ed. Edgerton 2.32 etc.), 12.8.20–21 (and Rām. 6.70.37cd–38 with 1582*), 12.28.36+168.15 (also Rām. 2.98.25, *Hitopadeśa* ed. Johnson 4.72, etc.), 12.68.8ab+91.3 (also Rām. 3.39.10ab and *Manu* 7.17), 12.68.41+137.99 (also Rām. 3.38.12a–d, 4.404* 1–2, *Manu* 7.4 and 7, etc.), 12.92.8ab (and Rām. 7 App. 8.367), 12.92.19 (also Rām. 2.94.50 and *Saura Purāṇa* 18.16), 12.144.6 (and Rām. 2.34.26, *Matyā Purāṇa* 210.18, etc.), 12.166.24 (cf. 5.105.12, 12.263.11 and 449* 32–3, also Rām. 4.33.12), 12.192.66c–67b+13.74.30 (also Rām. 2 App. 18.23–4 and *Mārkandeya Purāṇa* 41.43), 12.196.13ab (cf. Rām. 5.40.9cd), 13.21.19+46.14 (and Rām. 2.673*, *Manu* 9.3 etc.), 13.65.59cd (also Rām. 2.95.31cd and 2191* 2), and 13.112.11ab+4 App. 4.2199 (also Rām. 2.100.3cd and *Manu* 4.240ab).

Although the commonest formulæ occur throughout the *Mahābhārata*, there are a significant number which have a more limited distribution, sometimes but not always determined by the difference of subject matter between different parts, while there is also a marked variation in relative frequency between the text and the * passages for many (with some occurring preponderantly or exclusively in the text, and others mainly or exclusively in the * passages). For example *paurajānapadā janāḥ* occurs 11 times in the text only, *sa samprahāras tumulāḥ* occurs 10 times in the text of books 3 and 6–8 only, and the simile *visphūrjitam iわśaneḥ* occurs 14 times in the text only; by contrast, *prayatenāntarātmanā* occurs 5 times in * passages only, *naimiṣāranyavāsin* occurs 5 times in * passages and just twice in the text (significantly at 1.1.3b and 13.6d), *devadevāḥ sanātanāḥ* occurs 10 times in * passages and three times in the text (at 1.61.90b, 3.86.24b

and 15.35.16b), the simile *haviṣā kṛṣṇavartmeva* occurs 6 times in * passages only, and the compound *sarvadevanamaskṛta* occurs 7 times in * passages only. In a particularly interesting pair of formulæ *sarvapāpaḥ pramucyate*, occurring in the even *pādas* (the commoner position for most formulæ), is found more often in the text, with 26 occurrences there (more than half of them in the *Āranyakāparvan*) against 19 in * passages, whereas *mucyate sarvapāpebhyaḥ* occurring in odd *pādas* is found mainly in * passages, with 7 occurrences against 3 in the text (at 3.34.76a, 198.52e and 12.201.35c).

Examples of formulæ characteristic of particular books are quite numerous. There are two which are exclusive to the text of the *Āranyakāparvan* (*mātaliḥ śakrasārathīḥ* and *mā tāta sāhasaṁ karṣīḥ*) and another five which are commoner there than elsewhere; *dṝtarāṣṭrasya sainikāḥ* is confined to the text of the *Udyoga* and *Bhīṣma parvans*, with three other formulæ commonest in the *Bhīṣmaparvan*; there is a sizable group restricted to the text of the battle books (6–9), such as *anayad yamasādanam*, *abhidrudrāva vegena* (this does occur 4 times in * passages more widely) and *sarvasainyasya paśyataḥ* (14 occurrences in the text of these books and at 7 App. 22.36). There are four formulæ which are limited to the *Śānti* and *Anuśāsana parvans*, but found in both the text and * passages (*gacchanti paramāṁ gatim*, *devatānām ṛṣīnām ca*, *pitāmaha mahāprājña*, *yathāśrutanidarśana*), and another three found mainly in those two books (*iti dharmavido viduḥ*, *brahmabhūyāya kalpate*, *brahmā lokapitāmahāḥ*); for these their more religious nature obviously conditions the distribution. On the other hand, there is no obvious reason why *ataḥ param pravakṣyāmi* should be so much commoner in the text of the *Āśvamedhikāparvan* than elsewhere, whereas clearly it is the greater participation of Gāndhārī in the action that makes *gāndhārī ca yaśasvinī* as frequent in the *Āśramavāsikāparvan* as in the whole of the rest of the text. Again, it can only be the particular style of the author which accounts for the fact that no less than four stereotyped *pādas* occur predominantly in 13 App. 15 (*evaṁyuktasamācāra*, *tan me śāṁsitum arhasi*, *kim bhūyāḥ śrotum icchasi*, *nātrā kārya vicāraṇā*), since this long passage is the Southern equivalent to 13.126–134, especially when the frequency in this passage of other forms of repetition (to be discussed below) is considered.

The frequency with which a phrase or passage is repeated within a short space of its first occurrence seems on the whole a mark of the oral character of the *Mahābhārata*. However, a more specialised form of such repetition, which has a definite emphatic purpose, is the use

of refrains, which are found mainly in speeches as one of several rhetorical devices so used. The most striking, though hardly typical, example comes in the *Sabhāparvan* at the most dramatic point in the whole work, the dicing matches, where Yudhiṣṭhīra's final words as he makes each wager and Śakuni's response (amounting to 3 lines at a time) are repeated through much of 2.54 and 58. Parallelism within the verse could be regarded as the extreme form of repetition but by contrast its function is again emphatic and so it occurs predominantly within speeches. Another superficially similar feature is the extensive parallelism of passages which is associated with the Purāṇic style of narration and is found in some of the later passages; frequent instances can be found, for example, within the text at 3.80–83 (within the *Tīrthayatrāparvan*) or at 13.24 and 109–112 (but to quite an extent throughout the *Śānti* and *Anuśāsana parvans*), but the most striking instances are at 13 App. 15 (the southern equivalent to 13.126–134), which contains 20 different *pādas* repeated up to 39 times, and 14 App. 4 (the *Vaiṣṇavadharmaśāstra*), which contains 19 different *pādas* repeated up to 33 times. In such instances the effect is the reverse of emphatic and may well on occasion be due rather to a relatively unskilful writer than to oral techniques, although some instances clearly are intended to be emphatic, most notably the repetition of *yoginas tam prapaśyanti bhagavantam sanātanam* throughout the last *adhyāya* of the *Sanatsujātiya* (5.45.1ef, etc.—the regular use of 3-line verses is also noteworthy).

The distribution pattern for all these types of repeats is indeed quite revealing. There are 7 in the *Ādiparvan*, 4 in the *Sabhāparvan* (with another 6 in * passages), 43 in the *Āranyakaparvan* (of which 30 occur in 3.80–83), 4 in the *Vīrāṭaparvan* (with another 3 in * passages), 11 in the *Udyogaparvan*, 8 in the *Bhīṣmaparvan*, 7 in the *Dronaparvan* (and 9 in * passages), 6 in the *Kāmaparvan* (and 1 in a * passage), 5 in the *Śalyaparvan*, none in the *Sauptika* and *Strī parvans*, 25 in the *Śāntiparvan* (with 8 in * passages), 37 in the *Anuśāsanaparvan* (and 27 in * passages), 16 in the *Āśvamedhikaparvan* (and 19 in * passages), and none in the last four books.

Another way to consider these formulaic expressions is to divide them into three groups: those found equally in both epics and thus presumably part of the common traditional stock, those found in the *Mahābhārata* but not in the *Rāmāyaṇa* or only in later parts, and those found in the *Rāmāyaṇa* but not in the *Mahābhārata* or only in late

passages.³⁹ The formulæ common to both epics form the largest group and include all categories from stock similes through identical long compounds to introductions to speeches; a high proportion of the shared similes occurs in battle scenes. One example of a *pāda* exclusive to the *Mahābhārata* is *tapasā dagdhakilbiṣah*, occurring twelve times, though ‘only in *Mahābhārata* books 1, 3, 12–15, and never in the so-called war books’, as Hara notes. Another such *pāda*, found only in ‘the so-called war-books of the *Mahābhārata* (6–9)’, is *mṛtyum kṛtvā nivartanam* (with its variant in the *Dronaparvan* alone of *kṛtvā mṛtyum nivartanam*), which is never found in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, even though the epics share the very similar *samgrāmeṣv/samareṣv/samyugesv anivartinah*. Similarly, the pair of formulæ *prāhiṇod yamasādanam* and *prāhiṇon mṛtyulokāya*, common in the *Mahābhārata* battle books, do not occur in the *Rāmāyaṇa*. A fourth example is the long compound *palāyana-parāyanah*, common in the *Mahābhārata* but effectively absent from the *Rāmāyaṇa*. Particularly striking is the fact that, as Hara points out, ‘the most frequent phrase in the *Mahābhārata*’—especially frequent in the *Sānti* and *Anuśāsana parvans* but also common in the relatively late *Āśvamedhikaparvan*—is found usually as the second *pāda* of the full line *atrāpy udāharantīmam itihāsam purātanam* (with many minor variants of the first *pāda*); this never appears in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, and even the second *pāda* is absent from the *Rāmāyaṇa* text.

A few of the *Mahābhārata* formulæ found rarely in the *Rāmāyaṇa* occur even in the first stage of growth of the *Rāmāyaṇa* and these—with their equivalents in the opposite direction—are the most problematic, since on the basis of various other evidence it appears that the two epics were originally independent of each other, though sharing a common background, and that they came together in the process of their growth to their present form; overall the distribution of such *pādas* does indeed support this view. Some of these parallels are probably purely coincidental but others are definitely borrowed; in such cases the verse involved is presumably secondary, even though embedded in earlier material. An obvious example is the full line *pāndurenātapatrena dhriyamāṇena mūrdhani*, found in the *Rāmāyaṇa* only at 4.37.12ab (also 6.1882* 4) but eight times in the *Mahābhārata*, for

³⁹ In addition to my own article (1985a), this paragraph and the next are based on Hara 1993–94; I am most grateful to Professor Hara for providing me with a photocopy of his paper in advance of publication. He discusses another formula exclusive to the *Mahābhārata* in a subsequent article (Hara 1995).

such extensive parallelism cannot be accidental.⁴⁰ By contrast, *ete cānye ca bahavah* is so general a phrase that it might be expected to occur widely, but in fact it is very rare in the *Rāmāyaṇa* and, as already indicated, very common in the *Mahābhārata*; so here the parallelism could well be accidental.

Formulæ characteristic of the *Rāmāyaṇa* but incorporated into later stages of the *Mahābhārata* include several of the type consisting of name and personal epithet which are usually specific to one epic or the other. Several *Rāmāyaṇa* phrases recur, as might be expected, in the *Rāmopākhyāna* (3.258–275) or in other passages based on the *Rāmāyaṇa*.⁴¹ Parallels between a passage in the third book of each epic (Rām. 3.1.3–10 and Mbh. 3.145.29–32) indicate that one is borrowed from the other and the occurrence of two *Rāmāyaṇa* formulæ in one common line establishes the direction of borrowing as being from *Rāmāyaṇa* to *Mahābhārata*. In some other instances a degree of clustering can be observed and may suggest that the section concerned was contributed by a *sūta* familiar with the *Rāmāyaṇa*. Others are more randomly distributed, often in particularly late parts of the *Mahābhārata* textual tradition.⁴²

Besides the complete formulaic *pādas* that on the whole constitute the material that has been examined so far, there are of course many briefer phrases which show a significant measure of standardisation. Many in particular of the introductions and conclusions to speeches already noted fill less than the *pāda* but in general these are highly stereotyped. More interesting are those phrases which reveal something of the way in which the poets and reciters worked. A good example is provided by the various phrases grouped around such typical examples as *arjuno jayatāṁ varah*, *arjuno jayatāṁ śreṣṭhah*, *rathena rathināṁ varah*, *virathāṁ rathināṁ śreṣṭham*. The basic element is the final word, meaning ‘best of’, either *vara* in even *pādas* or *śreṣṭha* in odd *pādas* of the *śloka*, or *varīṣṭha* to conclude a *triṣṭubh pāda*, and usually in either the nominative or vocative. This is combined with the genitive plural of a present participle or a word of similar shape (with the suffixes *-mat*, *-vat*, *-vid* or *-bhṛt*) and, if the first word of the *pāda* is not a proper name, there is often a word play between it and the genitive, as in the second pair of examples given. Thus, it is the structure and

⁴⁰ See Brockington 1985a: 80.

⁴¹ See Brockington 1978 and 1986a.

⁴² For details see Brockington 1985a: 87–88.

overall sense which is fixed, rather than the precise wording. Some individual *pādas* are very frequent but many more occur only a few times but clearly belong to this family of phrases. Thus, for example, *arjuno jayatām varah* occurs 4 times in the text and 7 times in * passages, *arjuno jayatām śreṣṭhah* occurs 4 times in the text and 6 times in * passages, while *jayatām varah* and *jayatām śreṣṭhah* follow other words 26 and 4 times respectively in the text; *gatim gatimatām varah* occurs 4 times in the text (twice with *gatir* rather than *gatim*) and once in a * passage, without any shorter instances; *rathena rathinām varah* occurs 8 times, some other form or derivative of *ratha* precedes on another 13 occasions and *rathinām varah* follows some unrelated word on 46 occasions. The commonest of all these phrases is *dharmaḥṛtām varah*, occurring 48 times and a further 9 times preceded by *dharmaṁ* or the like (also another 9 times in the form *sarvadharmaḥṛtām varah*), while *dharmaḥṛtām śreṣṭhah* occurs 17 times in the three forms together and a *triṣṭubh* form occurs 6 times as *yudhiṣṭhiram dharmaḥṛtām variṣṭham* and a further 9 times following other words;⁴³ however, *śastrabṛtām varah* is almost as frequent (especially as *sarvaśastrabṛtām varah*). The third most frequent is *vadatām varah* (63 times, and *vadatām śreṣṭhah* 12 times). At the opposite end of the frequency range, *śaktyā śaktimatām varah* occurs just three times and *śaktimatām śreṣṭhah* once, and *kālam kālavidām vara* once only, but clearly these are modelled on the commoner forms. So too *śreṣṭhah sarvadhanuṣmatām* occurring 5 times and *mukhyah sarvadhanuṣmatām* found once only are probably related, despite the shift in word order. The degree of stereotyping involved is illustrated by the fact that several phrases identical in meaning to *śastrabṛtām varah* and virtually so in form are relatively infrequent: *astrabṛtām varah/vidām varah/śreṣṭhah*, *astraviduṣām varah/śreṣṭhah*, *astravidām varah/śreṣṭhah*, *astraviduṣām varah/śreṣṭhah*, of which the commonest is *astravidām varah* occurring 7 times in book 7 and once in book 9. Forms of intermediate frequency are: *japatām varah* (14 times, and *japatām śreṣṭha* once), *tapatām varah* (9 times, also *tapatyām tapatām śreṣṭha* once), *dharmavidām varah/śreṣṭhah/variṣṭhah*, *praśnām praśnavidām varah*, *praharatām vara/śreṣṭhah*, *prāṇabṛtām varah/śreṣṭhah*, *balavatām varah/śreṣṭhah*, *buddhimatām varah/śreṣṭhah*, *matimatām varah/śreṣṭhah*, *vedavidām*

⁴³ It is interesting also to note who this phrase, *dharmaḥṛtām varah/śreṣṭhah*, is used to describe. It is used of Bhīṣma six times in all, but not commonly of others; it is not used of Karṇa (who is, however, called *śastrabṛtām varah/śreṣṭhah* twice in the text and twice in * passages), Krṣṇa, Drona, Pārtha or Bhīma. Bhīṣma himself is also termed *śastrabṛtām varah* (3 times), as are Droṇa and Pārtha.

varah/śreṣṭhah. As the first two examples illustrate, examples are regularly more frequent in even than in odd *pādas*.

Recently A. K. Ramanujan has taken this discussion a stage further by suggesting ‘that the central structuring principle of the epic is a certain kind of repetition’, and declaring ‘Not only are there repetitive phrases, similes, and formulaic descriptions that the students of oral poetics (Parry, Lord, et al.) have taught us to recognize, but incidents, scenes, settings, and especially relationships are repeated’.⁴⁴ He illustrates this by an examination of the genealogies of the main characters, noting the regular pattern of double espousal and double parentage for them. Thus, for example, Śaṃtanu has a human and a supernatural lover, Satyavatī and Gaṅgā respectively, while Satyavatī has also had intercourse with Parāśara, the offspring of which is Vyāsa, the ancestor of both the Pāṇḍavas and the Kauravas. Other patterns of repetition that Ramanujan identifies are that many of the main figures are born to their mothers before marriage or after widowhood, that certain characters and settings appear several times (most notably the Gaṅgā), that fires occur repeatedly, that Durvāsas appears in the life of Kuntī as well as Draupadī, and that whole situations like the heroes’ exile and disguise are replicated, either simultaneously or successively. Some of these are probably trivial but in general his suggestion seems justified that such repetitive elements foreshadow later events and recapture earlier ones, enhancing the structural unity of the work as a whole. This unity of structure would presumably belong to the original oral epic, although Ramanujan himself is more concerned to point to the way that the epic has grown and been transformed in the vernacular versions. It is evident, though, that the oral poets did not merely string together episodes and formulæ, or perhaps did not so much do so as constructed a pattern or framework to the work that is far more intricate than just an outline plot. Any assessment of the abilities of oral poets must not be too restricted and literary sophistication should not be taken without further consideration as a mark of written composition. Much more indicative of orality is likely to be the extent to which standard themes are employed in both narrative and description.

Written rather than oral composition may well also be responsible for another very late feature, the occurrence of what might be termed ‘bracketing’ repetitions; these are cases where the first and fourth

⁴⁴ Ramanujan 1991a: 421–22.

pādas of a verse are fixed and the second and third vary. Instances are limited in *śloka* passages to the *Śānti*, *Anuśāsana* and *Āśvamedhika parvans* (for example *nāham ātmārtham icchāmi... | ... vaśe tiṣṭhati nityadā* at 14.32.17a+d, 18a+d, 19a+d, 20a+d, 21a+d and 22a+d). In some instances the repetition is spaced more widely, for example at the beginning and end of each section in the *Sodaśarājākīya* at 12.29 (thus 12.29.16b and 21 bracket the passage on the first king, 22b and 27 that on the second, and so on).⁴⁵ This passage also contains the only instance in the text of repetitions of complete verses apart from the *Sabhāparvan* instance noted above and two in the *Āśvamedhikaparvan*, where the phenomenon is found in *adhyāyas* 23 and 30 (in the latter case, it is two verses together that are repeated). There are also several instances of repetitions of two or more *pādas* in this part of the *Āśvamedhikaparvan*: *śreṣṭho ḥam asmi sarveśām śrūyatām yena hetuna*, 14.23.13cd, 16cd, 19cd; *tayor madhye hutāśanah | etad rūpam udānasya paramam brāhmaṇā viduh* 14.24.12def, 14bcd, 15bcd, 16bcd, 17bcd, 18bcd; *eko x x nāsti tato dvitīyo | yo hṛcchrayas tam aham anubravīmi*, 14.26.2ab, 3ab, 4ab, 5ab; *puspāṇī ca phalāṇī ca | sijantah pādapās tatra vyāpya tiṣṭhanti tad vanam*, 14.27.8b-d, 9b-d, 10b-d, 11b-d, 12b-d, 13b (only but cd similar); and a large part of the verse at 14.30.9, 12, 18, 21, 24cd. It is interesting, and quite possibly significant, that the *Sodaśarājākīya* passages borrow at one point from a late section of the *Rāmāyaṇa* and that the *Āśvamedhikaparvan* shares the theme of the horse-sacrifice with the late *Bāla* and *Uttara kāṇḍas* of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. There is an equivalent in *triṣṭubh* verses in the first chapter of the *Ādiparvan*, where Dhṛtarāṣṭra in a kind of flashback utters a series of laments over the outcome of the war and the verses begin *yadāśrauṣam...* and the final line is *tadā nāśamse vijayāya samjaya* (1.1.102–155). The lateness of these passages is unmistakable and points towards written composition as well as transmission.

⁴⁵ This repetition is even more extensive in the other substantially later version of the *Sodaśarājākīya* at 7 App. 8, since that adds a third line to the closing verse; for details on the *Sodaśarājākīya* passages see Brockington 1986a. The other instances of these ‘bracketing’ repetitions are: *naitasyeha yathāśmākam... | ... tena pīvāñsunahsakah*, 13.95.4a+d, 5a+d, 6a+d, 7a+d, 8a+d, 9a+d, 10a+d; *satakratur abhikruddhah tatra vajram avāśrjat || sa vadhyamāno vajrena... | ... jagrāha viṣayāṇi tataḥ*, 14.11.9a+d (8cd similar only), 10c-11a+d, 12c-13a+d, 14.c-15a+d, 16c-17a+d; *yo māṁ prayatake hantum... | ... punah prādurbhavāny aham*, 14.13.12d+f, 13a+d, 14a+d, 15a (only), 16a+d, 17a (only).

Metrics

The earliest serious attempts to examine the metres of the *Mahābhārata* (rather than more general studies or those concentrating on Vedic metre) were by Josef Zubatý and Hermann Jacobi towards the end of the 19th century.⁴⁶ Zubatý looked at the relationship between the *triṣṭubh* and *jagatī* metres, favouring Oldenberg's theory—based on the Vedic evidence—that the *jagatī* developed from the *triṣṭubh*, and provided a detailed listing of the occurrences of both, including irregular forms. Jacobi, in a much briefer article, gave a summary of the metrical peculiarities of the *śloka* in the third to fifth *parvans* of the *Mahābhārata* in terms of instances of the second *vipulā* with non-diiambic first *pāda* (with particular reference to the occurrence of the caesura after the fourth syllable) and of hypermetric *pādas*. Next Hopkins devoted nearly half his *Great Epic of India* to metrical analysis.⁴⁷ He firmly propounded an order of development from the free syllabic metres to the fixed syllabic ones and then, through the resolution of specific heavy syllables to those where ‘the number of moræ, not the number of syllables, was reckoned.’ Like his predecessors he stressed the derivation of both the *śloka* and the *triṣṭubh* metres in the epics from Vedic precursors and seems to suggest a sequence of *triṣṭubh* narrative, *śloka* narrative and *triṣṭubh* closing verses: ‘Alternation of *triṣṭubh* and *jagatī pādas* in the same stanza helped somewhat to mitigate the weary effect of this metre; but it gradually yielded before the *çloka* or passed into other forms. One of its decadent uses was to furnish new tags for the end of chapters of *çlokas*. This was an old use, but it is extended in the later epic.’⁴⁸ Hopkins also noted the use, especially in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, of ‘the later *triṣṭubh*’ for special literary effect.

From his extensive scansion of the *Mahābhārata*, Hopkins concluded that the ordinary, *pathyā* form of the prior *pāda* of the *śloka* has $\text{---} \text{---} \text{---}$ preceded most commonly by a spondaic first half of the *pāda* or, in reducing order of frequency, a trochaic, pyrrhic or iambic first half, and that the *vipulās* (four types, with a fifth form occurring sporadically in the *Mahābhārata*) are almost always found after an iambic first half and occur on average in 12.5% of lines. ‘There is no “epic usage” in respect of the proportion of *vipulās* to *pathyās*. The fact

⁴⁶ Zubatý 1889, and Jacobi 1896.

⁴⁷ Hopkins 1901a: 191–362, chapter four, ‘Epic Versification’.

⁴⁸ Hopkins 1901a: 211–12.

that there is considerable variety proves little in regard to difference of authors, since many conditions affect the ratio. Not only is there apt to be a larger number of *vipulās* in scenes of excitement, as Professor Jacobi, I think, has somewhere observed, but also a monotonous list develops *vipulās*, partly because the dullness of the subject requires the livelier effect of the skipping *vipulā*.⁴⁹ On the other hand, according to Hopkins, the *śloka* in the *Rāmāyaṇa* stands midway between the normal *Mahābhārata* pattern and the classical pattern but he emphasises the degree of variation found in both texts, while broadly equating the *Rāmāyaṇa* pattern with that found in the didactic parts of the *Mahābhārata*. However, the continuous iambic *anuṣṭubh* or *pramāṇikā*, found at 12.309.32–69, ‘is certainly later than other epic forms’ and in Hopkins’ view was ‘written by a poetaster who presents old ideas in a new style’; the *pramāṇikā* also occurs at 5.36.14 and another non-*śloka* eight-syllable metre, the all spondaic *vidyunmālā*, is found at 12.322.11–12 (with internal resolutions in 12cd). The second *pāda* of the *śloka* almost invariably ends with a diiambic second half, while the first half may have any one of seven forms (although a spondee commonly precedes the second half). Hopkins also comments on the occurrence of hypermetric *ślokas*, most commonly with an extra short syllable preceding what would otherwise be an initial short syllable.

With regard to the *triṣṭubh* verses, Hopkins noted that the rarest forms are those with the same initial scansion as the commonest forms of the *śloka* (the *pathyā* and the first and third *vipulās*) and that, as this implies, the *triṣṭubh* in the *Mahābhārata* is not of one uniform type, with in particular about one fifth having 12-syllable *pādas*, by contrast with the *Rāmāyaṇa*, where the *upajāti* form is almost exclusively found; however, the *Mahābhārata* shows considerable internal variation, from half a dozen hypermetric *triṣṭubhs* out of 57 in 7.154 to a pattern of almost solely *upajātis* for the *triṣṭubhs* of the *Virāṭaparvan*. He also argued that both 10-syllable and 12-syllable forms (and even occasional 13-syllable forms) with the characteristic final cadence of the *triṣṭubh* should be regarded as ‘catalectic’ (submetric) and hypermetric forms rather than the latter as *jagatī* (restricting that designation to lines with a diiambic close). Hopkins also gave considerable attention to the growth of pure forms from the mixed *triṣṭubh*, cataloguing the occurrences of complete *śalinī*, *vātormī*, *vaiśvadevī*, *rucirā*, *rathoddhatā*, *bhujangaprayāta*, *drutavilambita*, *praharsinī*, *asambādhā*, *vasantatilakā*, *mālinī*

⁴⁹ Hopkins 1901a: 223, with p. 238 quoted later in this paragraph.

and *sārdūlavikṛīdita* stanzas, as well as remarking on occurrences of *puspitāgrā* and *aparavaktra* verses, plus a few that come close to being *vaitāliya* and a very limited number of *āryā* verses. He concluded his survey by examining and tabulating the distribution of these more elaborate metres, noting for example that *rucirā* verses occur only in books 1, 3, 7, 12 and 13 (and also in the *Harivamśa*) and that the ‘tag-metres of Ādi are confined to the first quarter (two thousand) of the eight thousand in the whole book’; the inferences he drew from these statistics were that such verses occur almost entirely in ‘the most modern part’ of the *Ādiparvan*, that their absence from the *Virāṭaparvan* ‘indicates perhaps that it was written between the time of the early epic and the whole pseudo-epic.’ Hopkins also argued that ‘the sometime intrusion into the middle of a chapter of metres used originally only as tags, shows that parts of the Mahābhārata reflect a later phase than that of the Rāmāyaṇa, which still confines them to their earlier function.’⁵⁰

For all the thoroughness of its execution and the insight of the conclusions, there were two main limitations to the analysis undertaken so painstakingly by Hopkins: his dependence on the terminology of classical Greek and Latin metrics and the defective nature of the texts that he worked with. The first scholar to use the Critical Edition as the basis for analysis was Edgerton, who examined briefly the *śloka* verses and more fully the *trīṣṭubh* and *jagatī* verses of the *Sabhāparvan* (on which he was working as editor) and also of the *Ādiparvan*, the *Virāṭaparvan* and the first half of the *Udyogaparvan*.⁵¹ With regard to the *śloka* he listed the nine hypermetric lines found in the book (out of 2238 verses) and noted that all occur in the first half of the line and involve resolution of the initial syllable; he also noted the occurrence of a single verse in *halamukhī* metre (2.38.40). He affirmed even more emphatically than Hopkins that the *trīṣṭubh* and *jagatī* forms need not be separated and occur commonly within the same verse in some parts of the epic, therefore using the term *trīṣṭubh* for both. He ascertained that hypermetric *pādas* occur, on the whole, in all *trīṣṭubh* passages of the *Sabhāparvan* but that the *Virāṭaparvan*, though containing many passages in these metres, does not contain a single hypermetric line and that these passages differed in other respects too: the rarity of mixing of *trīṣṭubh* and *jagatī* in the same

⁵⁰ Hopkins 1901a: 357 and 361.

⁵¹ Edgerton 1943–44: 6 (*śloka* metre) and 1939.

verse and the high proportion of *upajātis*. He notes that the *Ādīparvan* and the first half of the *Udyogaparvan* contain a certain amount of both types—which he calls for convenience the *Sabhā* and *Virāṭa* types—but that the *Virāṭa* type is very rare compared with the *Sabhā* type, although it does constitute the whole of the first two *adhyāyas* of the *Udyogaparvan*, following on, that is, from the *Virāṭaparvan* to which Edgerton surmises that they may belong genetically, as well as occurring in *adhyāya* 61, 64.12–15 and 71.35–37. In the *Ādīparvan* the *Virāṭa* type is virtually limited to the *trīṣṭubhs* found in *adhyāyas* 17–45, which also contain a number of classical metrical forms (*ruciṛā*, *praharśinī* and *aparavaktra*). Edgerton then demonstrates that the role of the caesura, falling after either the fourth or the fifth syllable, is central to an understanding of these phenomena. When the caesura is after the fifth syllable the line almost invariably shows the *upajāti* form, whereas when the caesura is after the fourth syllable (which is much commoner in the *Sabhāparvan*) the third and seventh syllables are usually long and the fifth not uncommonly short; he suggests that essentially the commonest type of hypermetric *pāda* (accounting for well over 80% of the total) can be seen as simply a combination of the first part of a late-caesura *pāda* with the second part of an early-caesura *pāda* (as in the Vedic *trīṣṭubh* from which it is no doubt inherited). Much less common (fewer than 35 instances in the material examined by Edgerton) is the type that can be explained as the resolution of a long into two shorts after the caesura in a line with early caesura, with other forms less frequent still. Submetrical lines are extremely infrequent (only 14, spread between the *Ādīparvan* and the first half of the *Udyogaparvan* in the material examined by Edgerton) and in his view constitute the opposite of the commonest form of hypermetric line: the combination of the first part of an early-caesura line with the second part of a late-caesura line. The elegance of the explanation is a strong point in its favour.

Mary Carroll Smith has subsequently provided a full analysis of the *trīṣṭubh* verses in the *Mahābhārata*.⁵² She separates out the irregular *trīṣṭubh* verses, notes their similarity with the late Vedic *trīṣṭubh* and argues that the *trīṣṭubh* clusters are in fact the core of the epic. The main metre of the text is of course the *śloka* metre, also called *anuṣṭubh*, in which 94% of the text is composed. The remainder, some

⁵² Smith 1992. This is a reworking of her Harvard 1972 thesis (*The core of India's great Epic*), of which Smith 1975 is a brief summary.

4500 verses, are mainly in *triṣṭubh* metre—four fifths are in *triṣṭubh* or *jagatī*—but a considerable proportion do not conform to the classical metrical patterns for these metres. Approximately 1000 of the *triṣṭubh* verses are *upajāti* and in addition one or two examples of the *indravajrā* form (with invariant light first syllable) are found. Similarly, for the 12-syllable *jagatī* metre, the classical pattern is the *vamśastha* but, although several long passages of *vamśastha* occur in the *Virāṭaparvan*, there are a substantial number of irregular verses. However, there are about 2000 *triṣṭubh* verses with random prosodic patterns, which Smith for convenience terms ‘irregular’ and which she considers to be the oldest form of the metre. Her basic argument is that the passages in irregular *triṣṭubhs* are the core of the epic: ‘I am convinced that they were memorized at an early time, and that the *śloka* formulations would have been constantly generated from the fixed core as a type of commentary and expansion.’⁵³ By memorisation she means something analogous to the way in which the Vedic hymns were recorded, explicitly contrasting it with the more spontaneous formulation of the epic in general and rightly pointing out that the most frequently used metre in the *Rgveda* is the 11-syllable *triṣṭubh* verse without a fixed quantitative pattern. Clusters of four or more consecutive verses in irregular *triṣṭubhs* constitute for her a non-regular passage and such passages provide the best evidence for thematic and narrative unities. By ‘excising’ the *triṣṭubh* verses, she claims to have revealed in them the earliest and more *kṣatriya* oriented form of the epic. The idea that the narrative *triṣṭubhs* are early had already occurred to Hopkins, as noted above, and it is superficially attractive; however, there are problems in the way that so much of what is identified by Smith’s criteria as part of the core of the epic seems on other grounds to be relatively late, as will become apparent from the following survey of her findings in relation to the next section on the growth and development of the *Mahābhārata*.

The *Ādiparvan* as a whole contains 450 non-*śloka* verses, of which 310 are irregular *triṣṭubhs*. The *triṣṭubh* verses occur in 8 of the 19 sub *parvans* and cluster into five main groups: the table of contents, the hymn to the Aśvins, the snake sacrifice, Yayāti episodes, and the courtship and marriage of Draupadī. The table of contents, *anukramanī*, contains 60 *triṣṭubh* verses out of 210, with 57 of them in a sequence (1.1.102–158) providing an outline of the central action of the epic

⁵³ Smith 1992: 2.

and having no equivalent in *sloka* metre. Smith sees this as setting out an order of events for the singer, any one of which would have provided the basis for a night's story telling. The highly formulaic way in which Dhṛtarāṣṭra's laments are presented has already been commented on above, where it was interpreted as a sign of lateness, and the large number of * passages for this section (35* to 55*) do not suggest a stable text. Smith notes that the repeated final line is hypermetric (with the final cadence being the regular *jagatī* cadence with antepenultimate long syllable) and by implication sees it as an early feature. It does seem to be, as van Buitenen has called it,⁵⁴ an 'independent text' but this says nothing about when it was incorporated into the *Ādiparvan*. The hymn to the Aśvins (1.3.60–70) has of course long been recognised as an imitation of a Vedic hymn but, while having more than a third hypermetric lines, it also has roughly another quarter pure *upajāti* lines, which indicates to Smith its composite character.⁵⁵ With regard to the *triṣṭubh* verses in the passage on the snake sacrifice, she suggests that the use of several classical metres could indicate an attempt at embellishment. The 32 *triṣṭubh* verses at the end of *Āstikaparvan* contain a considerable number of irregular verses, although the latter part of *adhyāya* 50 (verses 10–17) has more than 60% of *upajāti* lines and 'it seems quite possible that a later poet or redactor simply added on to the older material in the first eight verses which is a formulaic set of comparisons of Janamejaya's sacrifice to famous Vedic sacrifices.'⁵⁶ The first seven verses do indeed have a two-line refrain and also—although Smith does not note this—contain a reference to Rāma Dāśarathi as a great sacrificer, but these facts more probably indicate a relatively late date even for the first part of the chapter. In the following three chapters the *triṣṭubh* verses occur at random within the *sloka* passages. About 100 irregular *triṣṭubh* verses are found in the stories of Yayāti (21½ verses in *adhyāya* 71 and a predominance of *triṣṭubh* verses in *adhyāyas* 82–88, with proportions of *upajāti* lines ranging up to 60% in *adhyāyas* 83 and 86). The final block of *triṣṭubh* verses are on Draupadi's *svayamvara* and wedding (1.176–189) and Smith suggests that, as we inherit the stories, we have a mixture of *sloka* and *triṣṭubh* narratives, in which

⁵⁴ *Mahābhārata* 1973–78, I, 437.

⁵⁵ Specifically she suggests (p. 46): 'In the Aśvin hymn the location of the *upajāti* lines at: 60. 3,4; 61. 3,4; 66. 4; 67. 4; 68. 4, and 70. 1,2, may indicate where a later poet went to work.'

⁵⁶ Smith 1992: 50.

some variation in emphasis and content is visible; in a qualification to Edgerton's analysis of the *triṣṭubh* verses, Smith notes that these have a high proportion of regular *upajāti* metre (with the exception of *adhy.* 189) and represent a development approaching the classical Sanskrit pattern of fixed *upajāti* lines. However, Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma's visit to the hidden Pāṇḍavas (1.183) is narrated in a mixture of *upajāti* and irregular *triṣṭubhs*, whereas the much longer narrative of a similar visit in the third book comprises 71 *upajāti* verses (3.118–120, apart from 119.1–4) in a later variation on the same theme.

In the *Sabhāparvan* there are 135 *triṣṭubh* verses within the *Dyūtarparvan* (2.43–65) and Smith considers that they contain a cohesive narrative which includes the gambling match, Draupadi's violation and the exiling of the Pāṇḍavas and Draupadī; another 13 *triṣṭubh* verses occur in the *Anudyūtarparvan* (2.66–72). In *adhyāya* 51 there are equal numbers of *śloka* and *triṣṭubh* verses and each metrical section seems to convey its own version of the preparations for the gambling match (but in my view as alternative rather than successive versions), while *adhyāyas* 56, 57 and 59 are almost entirely in *triṣṭubh* metre (with a significantly higher proportion of *upajāti* lines in 59, which may well indicate a later insertion in the *triṣṭubh* material); then a block of *triṣṭubh* verses at 60.16–47 contains 88% of *upajāti* lines.

In the *Āranyakaparvan* the *triṣṭubh* verses are frequently in longer groups, extending over two or three chapters, but many of these are in *upajāti* metre. *Adhyāyas* 5–6 are entirely in irregular *triṣṭubhs* (apart from 5 *śloka* verses at 3.6.1–5) and contain a low proportion of *upajāti* lines; *adhyāya* 35 is entirely in *triṣṭubh* metre with over half the lines being *upajāti*; in 118–120 (apart from 3.119.1–4 in *śloka*) and 180–1, narrating visits to the exiled Pāṇḍavas by Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma and by Kṛṣṇa alone, the pattern is of entirely regular *upajāti* verses, as it is also in *adhyāyas* 161, 173–4, 223, 225 and 249–50 (also 252.1–24). This last block comes near the start of the *Draupadīharanaparvan* in which *adhyāyas* 253–4 are also entirely in *triṣṭubh* (apart from one *śloka* at 3.254.1) but partly irregular—a 92% ratio of *upajāti* lines in 253 and a 47% ratio in 254. One theme which Smith identifies as linked with irregular *triṣṭubh* verses is that of a meeting with a seer, together with an associated framework device which she calls 'Pilgrimages to a Holy Water Site';⁵⁷ examples of this are found at 3.111–4 (the story of Rṣyaśringa, which has, however, an average *upajāti* ratio

⁵⁷ Smith 1992: 74.

of over 70%), at 3.132–4 (the story of Aṣṭāvakra and Bandin), at 3.184 (the story of Tārksya and Sarasvatī) and at 3.190.60–82 (the story of Vāmadeva and the king). By contrast, accounts of Bhīma picking golden lotuses (3.152.14–25), Arjuna returning from the mountain with magical weapons (3.161) and Bhīma encountering the snake (3.174) are all in *upajāti* and give every appearance of being close to classical Sanskrit literature.

In the *Virātaparvan* this pattern of regular classical metres is still more obvious, as Edgerton had already clearly demonstrated: *adhyāyas* 6 and 10 are in *vamśamāla*; *adhyāya* 7 and 11.1–5+8–13 are in *vamśastha*; *adhyāyas* 13–15 show a mixture of classical metres, mainly the twelve-syllable *vamśastha*; and *adhyāyas* 49 and 60–61 (with occasional verses in 63) are in *upajāti*. The first two chapters of the *Udyogaparvan* follow this pattern, being entirely in *upajāti* metre, and Edgerton therefore suggested that they ‘may belong genetically with the preceding fourth book.’⁵⁸

Thereafter the *Udyogaparvan* contains mainly irregular *triṣṭubh* verses, sometimes in extended passages, but *upajāti* passages do occur at *adhyāya* 61 (Karṇa’s boast that he will defeat Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa together) and at 5.146.27–35 and 147.31–35 (speeches by Gāndhārī and Dhṛtarāṣṭra). The *Samjayayānaparvan* (5.22–32) is entirely in irregular *triṣṭubhs*, apart from 5.29.48–51 and 5.31.1–32.2, whereas the following *Prajāgaraparvan* (5.33–41) has occasional irregular *triṣṭubh* verses scattered through a mainly *śloka* text, but Smith argues that ‘it is possible to establish a continuous narrative when the excised *triṣṭubhs* are rejoined’.⁵⁹ A considerable number of verses in the first of these passages employ the initial *kaccit* which occurs also in the *śloka* chapter, 2.5 (and its parallel in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, 2.94).⁶⁰ A high proportion of the *Sanatsujātāparvan* (5.42–45) is then in irregular *triṣṭubh* verses (with one *upajāti* as the final verse of *adhyāya* 42). The longest continuous block of irregular *triṣṭubh* verses in the *Mahābhārata* is found in the highly dramatic *adhyāya* 47, where Arjuna issues a challenge to the sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra (it comprises 103 verses, with 46 hypermetric lines and more *upajāti* lines in the last thirty verses than in the rest);

⁵⁸ Edgerton 1939: 165.

⁵⁹ Smith 1992: 78.

⁶⁰ The verses are 5.23.4–5, 9, 11, 15–16, 18–19, 30.1, 31–33, 38 and 32.8–9. As will be shown later, the *śloka* chapters are late, although Smith implies that the repetitive use of *kaccit* here is early (1992: 85). The only other *triṣṭubh* passages in which its repeated use occurs are 1.184.15–18 and 8.46.32–44.

it includes a description of the Pāṇḍava forces and there is another quite separate description of the Pāṇḍava equipment at 5.55.9–16 and one of the Kauravas in battle array at 6.20.1–15, both also in irregular *triṣṭubh* verses.

The *triṣṭubh* verses of books 6–8 show an increase in *upajāti* content but there are still a number of irregular *triṣṭubh* verses relating to the core story. However, in the remaining books there are very few that could be considered part of the narrative core, although there are some narrative passages relating to Indra or to Kṛṣṇa.⁶¹ The list of omens in irregular *triṣṭubhs* at 6.4.16–20 is repeated in similar wording and metre at 12.103.8–13 (other sets of omens also occur in non-*śloka* verses at 5.47, already mentioned, and 5.140.3–5), while similes for noise at 42.6–7 are similarly closely echoed in the same book at 95.52–53; these are clearly not integral to the narrative. The *Bhagavadgītā* contains several *triṣṭubh* verses interspersed but the only lengthy passage is in Kṛṣṇa’s theophany in chapter 11 (6.33.15–50), which contains 104 *upajāti* lines (a ratio of 72%).⁶² Bhīṣma’s dying advice to both sides in the war is rounded off by four irregular *triṣṭubh* verses (6.116.47–51) and in the first *triṣṭubh* verses of the next book (7.2.1–37, part irregular and part mixed classical forms) his death has already taken place.

The *Karṇaparvan* contains, in Smith’s view,⁶³ four groups of *triṣṭubh* verses that can be distinguished by their narrative content—Saṃjaya’s account of the battle (8.4.90–105), Karṇa’s preparation for battle (8.26–30), Arjuna’s preparation to kill Karṇa (8.45–54) and the battles of Karṇa and Bhīṣma, followed by the conflict of Arjuna and Karṇa (8.54–68)—of which the first is entirely in irregular *triṣṭubh* verses but

⁶¹ ‘With the exception of a passage of four verses in Book Nine, and one of ten verses in Book Fifteen, there are no other irregular *triṣṭubh* verses in the present text which need to be considered part of the narrative core of the Bhārata war epic. Several long passages of irregular verses with narrative material about the exploits of Indra, as well as similar treatment of some Krishna stories should form an important area of future research. The death of Krishna in a yogic trance (16.5.1–25f) is recounted only in non-regular *triṣṭubh* verse’ (Smith 1992: 92).

⁶² Smith says of this (1992: 101) that it is ‘an epitome of the warrior Dharma shown in the spiritual universe’ and that ‘The *triṣṭubh* text gives us the long-suspected key to the warrior code in India’s “Sacred Song”, and also (1992: 106) that ‘It may well be that the verses represent a later phase in the oral tradition of the warrior tale, but the essential theme of the passage is rooted in the Indo-European warrior ethos.’ Examination of the place of the *Bhagavadgītā* in the epic will be found in chapter 5, which presents a rather different view.

⁶³ Smith 1992: 95–96.

the others are more mixed with several *upajāti* verses and, for example, a group of *aparavaktra* verses at 8.26.60–70 and *vamśastha* at 8.62.36–62 (and elsewhere in this book *rathoddhatā* at 8.21.2–14); there are also four *mālinī* verses. Smith notes that one of the later *upajāti* verses (8.48.9) contains a reference to Viṣṇu, which probably in itself indicates a relatively late date.⁶⁴ The *Śalyaparvan* contains a passage of mixed *trīṣṭubh* verses, with several classical forms preponderant, at 9.16.7–51, narrating Śalya's death, and one of irregular *trīṣṭubh* verses at 9.58.9–13, where Bhīma taunts the dying Duryodhana. Elsewhere it has several *upajāti* verses (9.23.61–64, 27.55–63, 34.26–32 and 36–37, and as tag verses 49.65 and 50.51) and some *vamśastha* (53.34–35 and 56.60–67). The *Sauptikaparvan* contains only one passage in non-*śloka* metre: 10.10.17–30 are in *upajāti* metre. The *Śrīparvan* contains *upajāti* verses at 11.12.15 and 21.11–14 and one irregular *trīṣṭubh* at 26.5.

The *Śāntiparvan* contains a substantial number of scattered non-*śloka* verses but their general lateness is obvious from the variety of classical metrical patterns found. Thus the closing verses of *adhyāyas* include a *rucirā* at 12.47.72, *vamśasthas* at 48.15, 58.29–30, 71.14, 104.52, 136.211, 138.68–70, 161.46–48, 220.116–8, 221.87–94, 236.28–30, 274.60, 327.107, 343.11 and 344.10, *upajātis* at 49.80, 233.20, 242.25, 289.58–62, 290.103–110 and 337.68–69, a *vamśamala* at 50.36, *puspitāgrās* at 172.25–37 and 353.9. Many of the groups of verses within *adhyāyas* comprise either mixed classical metres or groups of *upajāti* verses. The *Anuśāsanaparvan*, as might be expected, shows a similar pattern, though with some different classical metres occurring: *mālinī* at 13.6.45–47, *praharṣinī* at 7.28 and 53.68–69, and *sālinī* at 119.23. The most striking feature of the *Āśvamedhikaparvan* is the way that several successive *adhyāyas* close with a *jagatī* verse on the three *gunas* (14.35.40, 36.40, 37.17, 38.18, 39.24, 40.9, 41.5 and 42.62), with another closing a subsequent *adhyāya* (14.63.17, preceded by two *upajātis*), but it also includes several blocks of irregular *trīṣṭubhs* (14.9.1–10, 13–37, 10.1–9, 11, 13–36, 13.9–10, 21.20–21, 23.7–8, 14, 17 and 20, 26.1–5, 28.1–5), two of *vamśastha* at 15.32–34 and 51.50–56, and two pairs of *upajātis* at 22.28–29 and 56.22–23. The remaining *parvans* have very few groups of such verses; five in the *Āśrama-vāsikaparvan* (15.12.14, 21.4–13 and 26.21–22 are irregular *trīṣṭubhs* and 25.27–28 and 32.5–18 are *upajātis*), two in the *Mausalaparvan* (one *upajāti* and one irregular at 4.4–5 and a whole chapter of irregular

⁶⁴ Smith 1992: 99.

triṣṭubhs for Kṛṣṇa's death at 5.1–25), one block of irregular *triṣṭubhs* in the *Mahāprasthānikaparvan* (17.3.8–16) and two verses in the *Svargārohanaparvan* (one irregular *triṣṭubh* at 18.5.50 and a *vasantatilakā* as the closing verse of the book, 18.5.54, which repeats 1.2.242).

The *śloka* material has also been subjected to metrical analysis with the aid of the computer, first by van Nooten (somewhat earlier than Smith's work on the *triṣṭubh*) and most recently by Muneo Tokunaga.⁶⁵ Between these two, M. R. Yardi published a statistical survey of the *śloka* material with the aim of establishing the chronology of the epic's composition by the analysis of variance in the proportion of long syllables in the free positions within the verse; his argument is that there was a natural propensity for individual authors unconsciously to use a higher or lower proportion.⁶⁶ On this rather dubious basis, which among other things ignores all real stylistic factors, and an idiosyncratic application of statistical methods, Yardi isolates an original *Bhārata* as recited by Vaiśampāyana (comprising 1.55–57, 5.22–34, 49–50, 54, 70, 145–149, 6.41–60, 7.11–25, 50–51, 64–102, 112–122, 131–173, 8.1–69, 9.1–32, 55–58, 60–64, 10.1–10, 12.59, 135–151, 13.1–27, 125–134 and 154), and four stages of additions, by the Sūta (including 1.124–199, 2.46–72, 4.1–29 and 63–67), Sauti (including 1.4–54, 58–123, 200–225, 2.1–45 and 4.30–62), the *Harivamśakāra* (3.13–90, 141–178, 184–206, 258–276, 9.33–54, 59, 12.310–320 and 321–337) and the *Parvasaṅgrahakāra* (1.1–3, 12.308–9, 13.106–110 and 135). These show some degree of agreement with the usual assessments of relative dating, attributing for example the *Rāmopākhyāna* and the *Nārāyaṇīya* to the author of the *Harivamśa*, but implausibly assign the bulk of the *Śānti* and *Anuśāsana parvans* to the Sūta and Sauti.

Taking Hopkins's work as his starting point but affirming that a more comprehensive system of classifying metrical patterns was needed, van Nooten analyses the *śloka* verses in the *Sabhāparvan*. He determined the scansion of all but the final syllable of each *pāda*, in part at least in order to check the traditional view that the initial syllable as well as the final one is indeterminate, but concludes that 'it appears from the corpus analyzed, the *Sabhāparvan*, that the weight of the initial syllable indeed is of little consequence in characterizing *anuṣṭubh* patterns'.⁶⁷ He provides in tabular form all the metrical patterns and

⁶⁵ van Nooten 1968 and Tokunaga 1995.

⁶⁶ Yardi 1986, also Yardi 1989b.

⁶⁷ van Nooten 1968: 355–56.

their frequency in both the first and second *pādas* of the line, which illustrates very clearly how completely they differ in preferred pattern. He also gives a table of frequencies, which shows that the *pathyā* close of the prior *pāda* is found in 832 per thousand lines, the 1st *vipulā* in 67, the 2nd in 33, the 3rd in 42 and the 4th in 25 (with also a minor ionic found sporadically, in one per thousand), while the diiambic close is almost invariable for the posterior *pāda*, since the only other pattern found is the major ionic (‐ - ˘ -), found in only one per thousand *ślokas*. Although van Nooten simply presents these figures (with a plea for the extension of such analysis to the rest of the *Mahābhārata*), it is interesting to note that the two instances of the pattern of a minor ionic with trochaic first foot (at 2.47.4c and 48.6a), the sole example of a dispondaic followed by a diiambic (at 48.1a), and the only unambiguous example of the major ionic ending (at 47.9b), all cluster in the description of the tribute brought to Yudhiṣṭhīra. The identification of the clustering of anomalies is an obvious extension of such analysis.

Tokunaga has indeed extended such metrical analysis of the *śloka* to the entire epic and taken the opportunity to include the eighth syllable, noting some interesting variations in proportion of long final syllable to short for the different metrical patterns; his tables provide data for each of the individual books, except that the last three are grouped together and the *Bhagavadgītā* and the *Nalopākhyāna* are also given separately. The preponderance of the *pathyā* close is clearly established, with the proportion of 83.2% for the *Sabhāparvan*—established by van Nooten and confirmed by Tokunaga's figures—being in fact the lowest (apart from the *Nalopākhyāna* at 82.9%) and the highest being for the *Bhīṣmaparvan* at 88.4% (with the *Bhagavadgītā* showing exactly the same proportion). The figures for the *vipulās* are more variable, as might be expected from their much lower frequency. The frequency of the first *vipulā* varies from 3.2% in the *Virāṭaparvan* to 6.2% in the *Āśramavāsikaparvan* (and as high as 8.3% in the *Nalopākhyāna*), of the second *vipulā* from 2.3% in the last three *parvans* to 4% in the *Karṇaparvan*, of the third *vipulā* from 2.8% in the *Śalyaparvan* (and even lower at 1.9% in the *Bhagavadgītā*) to 5.7% in the *Virāṭaparvan*, and of the fourth *vipulā* from 0.2% in the *Strīparvan* to 2.4% in the *Sabhāparvan*. For the even *pādas* Tokunaga provides data on the relative frequency of the different scensions of the first four syllables. For example, the double spondee is most frequent in the *Śāntiparvan* (occurring in 16.9% of *ślokas*) and the *Āśramavāsikaparvan* (16.6%) and lowest

in the *Strīparvan* (11.4%) among the complete books, but is even commoner in the *Bhagavadgītā* (18.4%) and less frequent in the *Nalopākhyāna* (10.7%); when it and - - - are counted together the highest ratio is still in the *Sāntiparvan* (29.6%) and the lowest in the *Strīparvan* (21.3%) while the *Bhagavadgītā* (28.7%) and the *Nalopākhyāna* (20.9%) are near or at the opposite extremes; conversely, - - - show the highest frequency in the *Kṛṇaparvan* (29.4%), with the next highest in the *Strīparvan* and the last three *parvans* (both 29.0%), while the lowest frequency is in the *Sāntiparvan* (24.2%), apart from the *Bhagavadgītā* (23.3%). Apart from - - -, all patterns with a light third syllable are so rare as to be virtually non-occurred.

Tokunaga himself observes that the metrical patterns of the *parvans* look fairly uniform, particularly when compared with the *Bhagavadgītā* and the *Nalopākhyāna*, but suggests that we may get more contrast when the investigation is taken to the level of the minor *parvans* or particular sections. Tokunaga also examines the hypermetric *pādas* found in the text, of which there are 281 in total. The vast majority (252) are instances of initial resolution, of which all but two have the opening - - - and a high proportion involve the name Janamejaya;⁶⁸ the remainder, he suggests, tend to show prakritic influence in words such as *unnayati* and *bhavati* (as for instance in the cluster of instances at 3.297.26a, 28a, 28c, 29a, 29c, 56a, 56c, 57a and 57c, with another instance involving different wording at 42a). The second category are clearly too sporadic to enable significant conclusions to be drawn, while those which are instances of initial resolution seem to be distributed broadly in accordance with the size of the different books, although the proportion in the *Ādīparvan* is higher than elsewhere (but over a third involve Janamejaya, who appears mainly in this book).⁶⁹

The occurrence of certain prose passages should also be noted. The main ones are 1.3 (the *Pausyaparvan*, containing no less than 156

⁶⁸ A substantial number more begin with the verbal prefixes *abhi*, *anu* and *ava* and, although Tokunaga does not suggest this, in these instances it is possible that the initial vowel might perhaps be elided, as with *dhiṣṭhita* (found for metrical reasons at 1.13.18b, 48.13b, 5.187.21d, 7.121.4d, 147.30d and 12.149.13d), *api* in *piḍhāya*, etc. Hopkins suggested but rejected the possibility that *abhiwadyanti* (occurring for example at 5.46.16a) might be pronounced *abhiwādenti* (1901a: 253–54).

⁶⁹ Totalling of Tokunaga's listing of the actual occurrences, together with the initial word involved, produces the following figures: 54 in bk 1 (19 involving Janamejaya, and 49 in *adhyāyas* 1–123 compared with 5 in 124–225), 10 in bk 2, 40 in bk 3, 4 in bk 4, 27 in bk 5 (with 13 of these in 5.170–197, the *Ambopākhyānaparvan*), 12 in bk 6, 16 in bk 7, 8 in bk 8 (4 involving Janamejaya), 4 in bk 9, 2 in bk 10, 1 in bk 11, 36 in bk 12, 24 in bk 13, 8 in bk 14, 3 in bk 15 and 1 in bk 18.

prose units), 3.190–191 (the *Mandukopākhyana* and the *Indradyumnopākhyana*), 12.325 (Nārada's *stotra* to Nārāyaṇa, the *Mahāpuruṣastava*—a single prose unit containing 171 epithets) and 12.329 (*Brāhmaṇamāhātmya*), with a number of shorter passages scattered throughout 12.183–185 (the end of the *Bṛhgubharadvājasamvāda*). Attempts by Oldenberg and by Hopkins to see in these passages a form of prose-poetry which is antecedent to the epic *śloka* are not successful. Indeed, they appear exceptionally late.

Growth and development

The best known version of the *Mahābhārata*—the vulgate—is that established in Vārāṇasī by Nīlakanṭha, a Marāṭhī brāhmaṇa, in the last quarter of the 17th century and usually identified with the Northern Recension; Nīlakanṭha also wrote an extensive commentary on the epic (first printed in Bombay in 1862–63). The first printed edition of the *Mahābhārata* was published in Calcutta from 1834 to 1839, while the longer Southern Recension was first published at Kumbakkonam from 1906 to 1910 (although this edition was in fact heavily influenced by the Northern recension). From an early period, scholars have been conscious of the variation within its textual tradition and sought to explain it by various means, as well as more generally to explain how the *Mahābhārata* came into being and what were its sources of inspiration.

Already as early as 1887, J. Darmesteter was looking to links with other Indo-European literatures both to interpret and to date the *Mahābhārata*. He compared Yudhiṣṭhira's renunciation in the *Mahāprasthānikāparvan* with Kai Khusrav's in the Iranian *Shāh Nāmah*, finding similarities in the overall narrative of a ruler who abandons his kingdom to journey to heaven, and concluded that the *Mahābhārata* account was borrowed from the *Shāh Nāmah*, probably under the Kuṣāṇas; however, the arguments that he adduced are not particularly cogent. From the opposite direction of establishing a *terminus ante quem*, K. T. Telang established that Bāṇa knew a form of the *Mahābhārata* which included the *Bhagavadgītā*,⁷⁰ and Georg Bühler examined the references to the *Mahābhārata* in Kumārila, showing

⁷⁰ *Bhagavadgītā* 1882: 28.

that by his time the *Mahābhārata* was evidently regarded not so much as an epic poem but as the great *smṛti* proclaimed by Vyāsa, which implies that much at least of the didactic element was by then included, that Kumārila knew the *Anukramanikā* and the *Parvasaṃgraha*, that he explicitly mentions the *Rājadharmā* and *Mokṣadharma parvans* (and by implication knew the *Āpaddharma*) and the *Dānadharmaparvan* (without indication of whether this was yet separated from the *Sāntiparvan* as the *Anuśāsanaparvan*), and knew the episode of Yudhiṣṭhīra's *āśvamedha* from the *Āśvamedhikaparvan*.⁷¹ As Bühler noted, these include many of the passages that are regarded as late in the growth of the text. He also stressed that Bāṇa's reference to the *Mahābhārata* being recited publicly at the Mahākāla temple in Ujjain implies both its didactic character and that its esteem in this respect must appreciably predate the beginning of the 7th century. The latter point is reinforced by an inscription from Cambodia of the same period, which states that copies of the *Mahābhārata*, *Rāmāyaṇa* and an unnamed *Purāṇa* were presented to the temple of Veal Kantel and that arrangements were made for their daily recitation, while a landgrant from Central India dated 532–3 A.D., in citing the *Mahābhārata*, refers to it as containing a hundred thousand verses (*śatasāhasrī saṃhitā*) which strongly implies the present extent of the text (as well as echoing the wording traditional in the work's own colophons).

That the *Mahābhārata* had reached its present extent before the 7th century A.D., and most probably well before then, can indeed be regarded as well established, despite occasional assertions to the contrary. For example, Vittore Pisani, though arguing earlier (in 1939) for a unitary authorship and accepting Bühler's argument that the epic had reached roughly its present form by 500 A.D., subsequently dated the *Anuśāsanaparvan* as added to the *Mahābhārata* 'not before 1000 A.D., perhaps still later', affirming more precisely in a later note that the *Anuśāsanaparvan*, 'whose existence is apparently unknown to Kṣemendra and Albiruni while the *Andhra Mahābhāratamu* and Hemacandra's *Bālabhārata* speak of it as different from Śānti,' must have been separated from the *Sāntiparvan* in the 11th–13th century A.D.⁷² The question of when the *Anuśāsanaparvan* became a separate book is problematic and one indication of a *terminus post quem* is provided by a palm-leaf manuscript from Qizil, studied by Dieter Schlingloff and assigned

⁷¹ In Bühler and Kirste 1892.

⁷² Pisani 1939 (repeated in Pisani 1954), 1968 and 1977–78.

palaeographically to the Kuṣāṇa period.⁷³ This includes fragments from what is evidently a summary of the Rāma story and a list of the *parvans* of the *Mahābhārata*; the latter is a mixture of major and minor *parvan* names and there are certain problems of identification because of lacunae but it is clear that neither the *Virāṭa* nor the *Anuśāsana parvan* is included.

The younger Holtzmann, in his presentation of the epic as a work on *dharma*, also developed a chronology for the transformation of the poem.⁷⁴ It began, in his view, as the work of court singers and, at a time of heightened nationalism, was shaped into a glorification of the nation's king, in which role he casts Aśoka. This original Buddhist poem was then, he suggests, the subject of three brāhmaical revisions, with Kṛṣṇa and the Pāṇḍavas taking over the role of the heroes from Duryodhana and his brothers in the second of these (and the Kauravas' earlier association with Buddhism facilitated their later linking with Śiva), while the third revision brings in Purāṇic elements. This view has long been discredited, especially the idea of an original Buddhist form, but the idea of inversion was, of course, taken up by Dahlmann who developed it into a theory of the unitary composition of the epic in both its narrative and didactic elements no later than 500 B.C.⁷⁵ As a date for the origins of the *Mahābhārata* this has its merits but as a date for its completion it is totally implausible.

From his own extensive study of the epic, and partly as a counterblast to Dahlmann, Hopkins put forward a scheme for its growth and for the dating of its various stages which has often been accepted without qualification by more recent scholars, despite his own recognition of its provisional nature. His summary of this scheme is worth quoting: 'we may tentatively assume as approximate dates of the whole work in its different stages: Bhārata (Kuru) lays, perhaps combined into one, but with no evidence of an epic before 400 B.C. A Mahābhārata tale with Pandu heroes, lays and legends combined by the Puranic diaskeuasts, Krishna as a demigod (no evidence of didactic form or of Krishna's divine supremacy), 400–200 B.C. Remaking of the epic with Krishna as all-god, intrusion of masses of didactic matter, addition of Puranic material old and new; multiplication of exploits, 200 B.C. to 100–200 A.D. The last books added

⁷³ Schlingloff 1969.

⁷⁴ Holtzmann (jun.) 1881 and 1892–95: I.

⁷⁵ Dahlmann 1895 and 1899.

with the introduction to the first book, the swollen Anuçāsana separated from Çānti and recognized as a separate book, 200 to 400 A.D.; and finally 400 A.D. +: occasional amplification. . . .⁷⁶

A complicating factor in any discussion of the dating of the *Mahābhārata* itself is the date of the war that forms its focus, since traditional Indian reckonings place this at an implausible date in relation to the rest of the evidence. For example, C. V. Vaidya's study of the growth and dating of the epic, which contains many useful insights into the work, accepts 3101 B.C. as the date of the war.⁷⁷ If the composition of the epic is then assigned to the same date (and 3102 is the most usual traditional date for the war or more exactly for Kṛṣṇa's death soon after), there are severe problems. Another tradition placing it in the 15th century B.C. is less unlikely but still several centuries too early on the available evidence. Probably the war, if it actually occurred, took place early in the 9th century B.C. However, the arguments for and against any particular date for the *Mahābhārata* battle will not be entered into here, nor will the question of its historicity, which seems incapable of resolution.

Attempts have also been made, especially by Indian archaeologists, to link the *Mahābhārata* events with the archaeological record of early India. B. B. Lal, in particular, proposed that the Painted Grey Ware and its associated culture was to be identified with the Aryans of the *Mahābhārata*; he noted its distribution over the upper Gaṅgā valley, the Doab and the banks of the Satluj, the Sarasvatī-Drśadvatī valley and western Rajasthan and argued that the actual sites were those mentioned in the *Mahābhārata*.⁷⁸ Earlier radiocarbon datings for the sites were around 1000 to 400 B.C. but more recent datings have suggested a period of 800–350 B.C., which is later than the likely dates of the events described in the *Mahābhārata* (though not of the composition of the work). Currently, Lal's ideas have fallen out of fashion with his colleagues because of the problems involved in the identification. Basically, any attempt to correlate the archaeological evidence and the literary tradition is likely to remain speculative and hazardous, unless or until some kind of written record is unearthed.

What can be done, even if in many cases only tentatively, is to develop a relative chronology of the different parts of the epic on

⁷⁶ Hopkins 1901a: 397–98.

⁷⁷ Vaidya 1905.

⁷⁸ Lal 1973, 1981, and various other articles.

either internal evidence or external attestation. For this task, Hopkins's outline quoted already provides the best initial framework. However, it is only natural that after the greater part of a century this needs to be updated and the analysis can be taken further. Some of the internal evidence has already been presented in the survey of the language, style and metrics of the work in the previous section and the implications of that will be indicated below, along with other more specific detail, some of which in its turn impinges on the subject-matter of the next section on the cultural material. It must be emphasised, however obvious it may seem, that such evidence only serves to date the relevant passage and the extension of that dating to other parts of the work must be done with the utmost caution. Nevertheless, it is quite clear that the *Mahābhārata* has undergone a considerable transformation over time.

While all this material provides important insights into the whole process of growth of the *Mahābhārata*, it does not provide anything approaching an exact chronology. On the other hand, there are a considerable number of passages in which incidental allusions indicate a relatively precise date, often in the first few centuries A.D. To begin with an instance where the evidence indicates both a closing date and one that is rather earlier than that just mentioned, it may be noted that an inscription at Besnagar (ancient Vidiśā), erected by Heliodorus around 100 B.C., contains a *śloka* recording one of the tenets of the cult—'three immortal precepts, *dama*, *tyāga* and *apramāda*, when they are well practised in this life lead to heaven'—which seems more or less directly to quote Mbh. 11.7.19.⁷⁹ Conversely, there is a reference to Rome and also to Antioch in the *Sabhāparvan*, if the reading proposed by Edgerton is accepted (*antākhiṁ caiva romāṇi ca yavanānāṁ purāṇ tathā* at 2.28.49ab) and this implies that the line could not have been composed before the 1st century A.D. and probably a century or so later; there is possibly also a reference to the Romans in the term *romaśāḥ* at 2.47.26b, as van Buitenen suggests in the notes to his translation.⁸⁰ Similarly, an earlier survey of the occurrences of the name Tukhāra or Tuṣāra in the *Mahābhārata* (2.47.26a, 3.48.21b, 174.12a, 8.51.18b, 64.16c and 12.65.13c), as well as of the Śakas, Yavanas and Cīnas led to the conclusion that 'these

⁷⁹ Cf. Hemchandra Raychaudhuri (1922b). The actual wording of the inscription runs *trini amuta padāni(su) anuhititāni nayanti svaga dama chāga apramāda*.

⁸⁰ Edgerton 1938; *Mahābhārata* 1973–78: II, 815.

passages of the Mahābhārata must have been composed after the end of the first century A.D.⁸¹ By contrast, the reference to Taxila (Takṣaśilā) at 18.5.29c is indeterminate for date, since it was known from at least the 5th century B.C. and lasted as a major centre of trade and learning till well into the Christian era. Issues of dating can work in both directions. The major *Tīrthayātrāparvan* gives a decidedly older picture of the sacred geography of North India than is available from other sources and yet there are various indications that this is a relatively late part of the *Mahābhārata* text. One example is the fact that it gives minimal prominence to Vārāṇasī, mentioning only a Śaiva sanctuary, Vṛṣadhvaja, and its associated bathing pool, Kapilāhrada, on the edge of the city (3.32.69), although an interpolation does add Avimukta. However, evidence for any Śaiva cult at Vārāṇasī does not appear in the archaeological record much before the end of the 3rd century A.D.⁸² More generally, the individual *parvans* differ considerably in their character and in the likely date of their constituent parts; these aspects will be surveyed next.

Whereas Hopkins thought that all of the *Ādīparvan* was later, van Buitenen has elaborated a more sophisticated view on the stages of accretion in this book, as well as of the epic as a whole.⁸³ He suggests that it is likely that the narrative originally began with Śaṃtanu, the birth of his son Bhīṣma from the Gaṅgā and Śaṃtanu's marriage to Satyavatī (1.91–95); then to this were added successively the story of Śakuntalā (1.62–69), the story of Pūru (the *Uttarayāyāta*, 1.81–88) and the account of the descent of the first generations (1.53–58); he also sees much of this first book and the *Āstīkaparvan* (1.13–53) in particular as a later addition. There is hardly any doubt that the first two *adhyāyas*, containing the list of contents and the summaries of the books, are among the latest parts not just of this book but of the epic as a whole. It is also significant that the Southern manuscripts begin a fresh numbering of the *adhyāyas* with the *Āstīkaparvan*, which Sukthankar suggests ‘seems to have preserved a valuable reminiscence of the time when the epic *began* with the *Āstīkaparvan*’.⁸⁴ Even more significant is the fact that not only are there a number of verses in

⁸¹ Pavel Poučka (1933). Incidentally, the two occurrences that Poučka noted in the *Rāmāyaṇa* occur as variant readings at 1.54.3d and 5.42.12b.

⁸² See Hans Bakker (1996a: 33).

⁸³ *Mahābhārata* 1973–78: I, xvi–xxiii.

⁸⁴ *Mahābhārata* 1933–66: I, 987.

common between the first *adhyāya* and 54–56, suggesting that one has been elaborated out of the other, but also the final *adhyāya* of the whole epic repeats several verses from 1.56 (18.5.39ab, 34–36 and 38 repeat with minor variants 1.56.19ab, 26, 28–29 and 33), which evidently was regarded by its author as the beginning of the work. One stylistic difference between the first part up to the *Āstīkaparvan* (1.1–53) and the rest of the book (1.54–225) is that it contains a much higher proportion of hypermetric *pādas* (28 out of 54 in all). In addition, the *Paulomaparvan* (1.4–12) is the first of the many Bhārgava expansions, on which more will be said at the end of this section.

H. D. Sankalia has examined what he terms iconographical elements in the *Ādiparvan*, suggesting that the descriptions of the deities and their names point to an early stage (not precisely defined) in the development of iconography when Śiva, Viṣṇu, Sūrya and the goddesses Śrī and Sarasvatī were primarily two-armed and one-faced, and when Gaṇeśa was still absent; for this purpose, he compares the textual descriptions with a selection of iconographic material from inscriptions, coins and sculptures.⁸⁵ There are a substantial number of verses in common between *adhyāyas* 16–17 and *Matsya Purāṇa* 249–251 (the readings of which are closer to the Southern recension). Mahesh Mehta has examined the *Suparṇākhyāna* and proposes some alterations to the text-critical reconstruction of certain passages in the *Ādiparvan*.⁸⁶ He also considers it impossible that the same author should have composed both 1.1 and 1.4 and concludes that 1.1 belongs to the same layer as the prose *Pausyaparvan*, whereas the main part of the narrative, including the *Paulomaparvan*, is attached to the second introduction in 1.4, and that ‘these two blocks were put together without any attempt at organic combination’.⁸⁷ He regards the redactor who juxtaposed the two as in all probability a Bhārgava, as is shown by the opening of *adhyāya* 4, while regarding it as inconceivable that they were composed by one individual.

The occurrence of two versions of essentially the same material is something of a feature of the *Ādiparvan*, as well as the inclusion of a number of separate episodes (*upākhyāna*), and several studies of the relative dating of such passages have been undertaken. The story of

⁸⁵ Sankalia 1943–44.

⁸⁶ Mehta 1971–72.

⁸⁷ Mehta 1973. As Mehta acknowledges, some of these ideas had already been put forward by Sukthankar in his Prolegomena to the *Ādiparvan*; cf. also Charpentier 1920.

Jaratkāru occurs in two versions: a shorter at 1.13.9–44 and a longer at 1.41.1–44.22, which presupposes however 1.34.12–18 and 1.35.10–36.7.⁸⁸ The shorter version is secondary since fundamental points in it are only intelligible in the light of the longer version; on the other hand, the comparison of Jaratkāru with Prajāpati occurs only in the shorter version and is significant for the relative dating of the narrative as a whole, since it suggests that its core goes back to the late Vedic period. Similarly, the story of Śamīka and Śrṅgin is found in two versions: a longer version at 1.36.8–38.26, where the narrator is Ugraśravas, and a shorter version at 1.45.20–46.12, where the narrator is Janamejaya's minister.⁸⁹ Monika Shee regards the longer version as secondary (in agreement with Albrecht Wezler), since this accounts for the abrupt insertion of the Parikṣit narrative and also indicates that originally *adhyāya* 45 followed immediately after *adhyāya* 3. 1.46.25 and 41 refer to a *r̥si* Uttānika and for an explanation one has to go back to 1.3.177, where it is narrated how a *muni* Uttānika informed Janamejaya that his father Parikṣit had been killed by the *nāga* Takṣaka; verse 1.3.194 then describes Janamejaya's question to his minister, whose response begins at 1.45.1 (with even verbal echoes of 1.3.194). The relatively late chapter on the partial incarnations (1.61) of Asuras and Devas in the various participants in the epic, nevertheless, does not yet show the identity of Nārāyaṇa, Viṣṇu and Kṛṣṇa, as Paul Hacker noted.

There have been numerous studies of the Śakuntalā episode (1.62–69) from the literary angle, and even a structuralist one by Madeleine Biardeau, but few that have any bearing on its position in the epic apart from one by Morton Smith and one by Stanley Insler.⁹⁰ Smith aims to disentangle various layers and interpolations in what he regards as a composite text by a combination of literary criticism and statistical analysis, but the results are not convincing. Insler rather doubtfully defines the basic story as the rape of a young girl and so draws comparisons with the story of Yavakrī as told in the *Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa* as well as the *Mahābhārata*, but also suggests that the end of the episode is partly modelled on the final episodes of the *Sambula Jātaka*

⁸⁸ These two versions have been studied by Monika Shee (1986). There is a previous treatment by Ulrich Schneider (1959), looking particularly at the problems arising from the conflict between the two demands of asceticism and raising a family.

⁸⁹ These have been studied by Shee (1986), also by Paul Hacker (1978, only the longer version), and Albrecht Wezler (1979).

⁹⁰ Biardeau 1979, Morton Smith 1960b and Insler 1989–90.

and asserts that the language of the story of Menakā and Viśvāmitra (Mbh. 1.66.1–10) has borrowed heavily from the narrative of Vāyu's seduction of Añjanā in the *Rāmāyaṇa* (4.65.8–18); however, although there is a similarity of situation between these last two, there is no coincidence of wording.

J. A. B. van Buitenen discusses the position of the *Uttarayāyāta* (1.81–88) in relation to its context and from the standpoint of the relationship between the epic and the Upaniṣadic traditions.⁹¹ Noting that its insertion into the text must have followed that of the *Yayāty-upākhyāna*, 1.70–80 (cf. also 5.118–120), he shows that it is nonetheless conceived of as a text in its own right, since the characters, apart from Yayāti, are all different. He suggests that the passage forms a concise but popular account of the process of transmigration (quite similar to that in *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 5.2–8, although there is no evidence that its author knew this Upaniṣad) and that it could be seen 'as a narrative dramatization of beliefs which also found expression in the Upaniṣads.' He further points to similarity with the *Katha Upaniṣad* as an indicator of its nature as a *kṣatriya* version of the kind of speculation found in the Upaniṣads and argues that alongside the Upaniṣads there existed a bardic literature having the same concerns as them, with no doubt considerable interaction between the two streams.

The episode of the burning of the Khāṇḍava forest (1.214–225) has received attention mainly for its symbolic meaning but two of the studies do address issues that are relevant here.⁹² Hiltebeitel, while broadly supporting Biardeau's approach to the passage, points out that this is influenced by her use of a text which includes the Northern addition to the passage (1 App. 118, cf. App. 120 and 121) and so gives greater prominence to the *pralaya* symbolism; however, in the text as given in the Critical Edition, although *pralaya* imagery does occur, the main thrust of the passage concerns a sort of initiatory test with ascetic overtones. Hiltebeitel also notes the relationship of this interpolated material on King Śvetakī's adharmic sacrifice, involving the ascetic Durvāsas, with another such passage in which Durvāsas with his thousand disciples appears as a mere foil to Kṛṣṇa (3 App. 25); he endorses Sukthankar's view that such passages represent a later phase of Kṛṣṇa worship, as well as van Buitenen's comment that the story of the Śāringaka birds can hardly be original,

⁹¹ van Buitenen 1967–68.

⁹² Hiltebeitel 1976a (citing Biardeau 1969–72, pt. III) and Mehendale 1984.

while adding that the Critical Edition is not to be followed blindly. Mehendale too sees the episode in the context of the epic as a whole and suggests that the slaughter by Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa of the inhabitants of the Khāṇḍava forest finds its retribution in the slaughter by Aśvatthāman of everyone in the Pāṇḍava camp (drawing numerous parallels between the two episodes) and in the mutual destruction of the Yādavas following their quarrel.

From the linguistic and metric evidence the *Sabhāparvan* is part of the oldest core of the *Mahābhārata*. Not only does it show the freest forms of both the *śloka* and the *trīṣṭubh* metres, but the grammatical features identified by Edgerton (including the relative frequency of hiatus) suggest an early date. J. A. B. van Buitenen has analysed the structure of the *Sabhāparvan* and regards it as based on the *rājasūya*.⁹³ He argues convincingly that Yudhiṣṭhira, having become ruler of the new territory of Khāṇḍava after the partition, needed to legitimate his kingship through the *rājasūya* and that the requirements of that ritual underly all the events of the book, including the apparent anomaly of the dicing match. Since the dicing is an integral part of the *rājasūya* in the epic as much as in the ritual manuals, Yudhiṣṭhira is not at fault in engaging in the gambling, while equally the interruption of the match after the contested staking of Draupadī can only be that and the repeat match (the *anudyūta*) is inevitable. The plot of the book is indeed tightly structured. As was noted in the second chapter, Gehrtz also but less convincingly sees in the *rājasūya* the ritual pattern which underlies the whole epic and forms its structure, with the battle at Kurukṣetra as the repetition of the dice game and the five Pāṇḍavas representing five functions of the king corresponding to Dumézil's three functions.⁹⁴ Despite its generally early character, there are some signs of expansion: for example, the identical wording of the opening of Arjuna's speech to Yudhiṣṭhira at 15.6–7 and 23.1–2 must raise some questions about the status of the intervening *Jārāsaṃdhaparvan* (2.18–22, which perhaps significantly has a much higher frequency of desiderative forms than the average for the *Sabhāparvan*), and the extensive similarities between parts of *adhyāya* 45 and of 47–49 suggest expansion of one of the passages, if not both. Rajendra Nanavati, who has examined 'secondary tales'—episodes

⁹³ van Buitenen 1972, also the introduction to the *Sabhāparvan* in *Mahābhārata* 1973–78: II, 3–30.

⁹⁴ Gehrtz 1975. See above, pp. 16–17.

added around the core narrative—contrasts the situation in the *Ādi-parvan*, which is largely made up of secondary material, with the infrequency of such episodes in the *Sabhāparvan* but identifies four on grounds of content and function: the story of the birth of Jarāsam-dha (2.16.12–18.27), the birth of Śiśupāla (2.40), the story of the hypocritical goose (2.38.30–40) and the quarrel between Virocana and Sudhanvan (2.68.58–79).⁹⁵

The *Āranyakaparvan* has long been recognised as incorporating material of diverse origin and a number of studies have been devoted to elucidating the textual history of individual episodes. The story of Nala and Damayantī (3.50–78), like that of Satyavat and Sāvitrī (3.277–283) is undoubtedly an independent piece subsequently incorporated into the book, although the study of its formulaic material by Daniel Donnet and the data included in Tokunaga's metrical studies, referred to above, establish its general epic character.⁹⁶ Nevertheless, Biardeau sees the *Nalopākhyāna* as specifically taking up the *Mahābhārata* plot in its own way and so shedding new light on both; in particular she sees the role of the *avatāra* as being assumed by the wife of the exiled king, leading her to consideration of the link between Kṛṣṇa and Kṛṣṇā Draupadī.⁹⁷ Lüders was the first to study in detail the different versions of the legend of Rāyaśringa; by comparing 3.110–113 with *Padma Purāṇa*, *Pātālakhanda* 13, he shows that the original version in the *Mahābhārata* was reworked on the model of the *Padma Purāṇa* version and that the *Rāmāyaṇa* version is later than both the *Mahābhārata* and *Padma Purāṇa* versions, while the *Skanda Purāṇa* account is based on the *Rāmāyaṇa* version.⁹⁸ He further suggests that the author of the *Mahābhārata* version seems to have known and utilised the version contained in the *gāthās* of the *Jātakas*.

Goldman compares two versions of the story of Rāma Jāmadagnya and his slaughter of the *kṣatriyas* (3.115–117 and 12.49) and finds that the *Āranyakaparvan* version, told by Rāma's disciple, Akṛtavraṇa, is the more complete and consistent from a Bhārgava standpoint. In contrast to its strict anti-*kṣatriya* bias, the *Śāntiparvan* version, told by

⁹⁵ Nanavati 1982: 150.

⁹⁶ Donnet 1980, and Tokunaga 1995.

⁹⁷ Biardeau 1984–85. Thomas Parkhill (1984) offers an interpretation through the tripartite process of transformation formulated by van Gennep and Turner for rites of passage. R. Morton Smith (1960a) seeks by the use of statistics to distinguish an author A and an interpolator B as its composers. Two recent examinations of its contents are by J. D. Smith (1992) and by David Shulman (1994).

⁹⁸ Lüders 1897 and 1901b. Yaroslav Vassilkov has also examined the episode (1979).

Kṛṣṇa, displays a clear *kṣatriya* bias and seems to be a secondary retelling, which suggests that other interests than those of the Bhṛgu redactors may have been involved in the origin of the *Śāntiparvan* version. In the *Āranyaka* version the *dhanurveda*, including knowledge of various missiles, was revealed to Jamadagni, whereas in the *Śānti* version Jamadagni is exclusively a tranquil sage and it is Rāma who is the great master of *dhanurveda*. However, the text of the *Mahābhārata* nowhere associates Rāma with use of the axe as a weapon, although this association is found in interpolated passages from several manuscripts.⁹⁹ Both Goldman and van Buitenen have separately compared Rāma's killing of Arjuna Kārtavīrya with the story of another Bhārava, Aurva (Mbh. 1.169–171), where the brāhmaṇa-*kṣatriya* struggle of the Jāmadagnya story also occurs in its essential details. It is clear from van Buitenen's brief but detailed study that the Aurva episode shows the oldest form of a story that was then transferred to Rāma, giving rise first to the *Āranyakaparvan* version and then to that of the *Śāntiparvan* (in the latter conclusions agreeing with Goldman).¹⁰⁰

The *Tīrthayātrāparvan* (3.80–153) as a whole clearly has a fairly complex history. Of the two catalogues of *tīrthas* with which it begins, the section containing that by Pulastya (3.80–83) seems to be a later insertion into the whole relatively late passage; these are some of the longest *adhyāyas* in the book (133, 178, 143 and 114 verses). Oberlies has demonstrated the similarities to Arjuna's tour of pilgrimage sites in the *Ādiparvan* (1.207–210) and plausibly suggests that the other four brothers are here following in his footsteps, as it were.¹⁰¹ Shee has shown that the story of Medhāvin (3.136.3–13) is interpolated into the story of Yavakrī, narrated by Lomaśa on the way to Raibhya's *āśrama* (3.135.9–139.23).¹⁰² In a study of the two Gandhamādana episodes, Reinholt Grünendahl sees the first episode (3.140–153) as being younger than the second (3.155–162) and as influenced by Nārāyaṇa worship.¹⁰³ Certainly, the occurrence within the first of

⁹⁹ Goldman 1972a. Mbh. 3.115–117 is translated with notes in his book on the Bhṛgus of the *Mahābhārata* (Goldman 1977: 18–25), which contains further discussion throughout. Elsewhere Goldman discusses Rāma's use of the axe in various texts (1972b). Comment on Rāma Jāmadagnya as an *avatāra* will be found in the next chapter.

¹⁰⁰ Goldman translates the Aurva episode (1977: 11–17); van Buitenen discusses the two episodes and their relationship (*Mahābhārata* 1973–78: 146–50).

¹⁰¹ Oberlies 1995a.

¹⁰² Shee 1986: 119–43.

¹⁰³ Grünendahl 1993.

Bhīma's encounter with Hanumān (3.146–50) with its thorough acquaintance with the *Rāmāyana* establishes it as relatively late.¹⁰⁴ A peculiarity of the first episode is the switching between the names Gandhamādana and Kailāsa (with Kailāsa at beginning and end, also at 145.15) in a way that suggests their identity. Within the second episode, 3.155.36–82 has been identified by V. S. Agrawala through a study of the words *āmra* and *sahakāra* as an addition to the original text during the Gupta period—a list of trees and plants such as is found here is very likely to be a later poetic embellishment—and similarly he suggests from an examination of the words and concepts in 5.94–122, especially its Pāñcarātra orientation and the geographical account in the story of Gālava, that this passage too should be assigned to the Gupta period, which he sees as the closing period for the addition of material to the epic.¹⁰⁵

Much of the session with Mārkanḍeya (3.179–221) is clearly late from a consideration of its contents: discourses on *karma*, the greatness of brāhmans, the Yugas, Mārkanḍeya's vision of Nārāyaṇa, the coming of Kalki to restore the world, and the dialogue between a brāhmaṇ and a hunter (the *dharma-yādha* episode).¹⁰⁶ In the case of the dialogue between a brāhmaṇ and a hunter (3.198–206) this is confirmed not only by the exceptional length of its opening *adhyāya* but even more by the numerous borrowings from other parts of the *Mahābhārata*, in particular the correspondence of 3.203.13–30 and 39–48 with 12.178.1–17 and 182.9–15, which form part of the debate between Bhṛgu and Bharadvāja in the *Mokṣadharma*. The textual history of the *Rāmopākhyāna* (3.258–275) will be discussed in the first section of chapter ten. Herman Lommel connects the story of Satyavat and Sāvitrī (3.277–83) with the myth of the marriage of Soma and Sūryā in the *Rgveda* and the *Atharvaveda* and argues that the practice of *satī* can only be found in younger, interpolated parts of the epics and that the legend of Satyavat and Sāvitrī is a reflection of this practice.¹⁰⁷

The *Vrāṭaparvan* is clearly basically a unit but there are sharply

¹⁰⁴ Further remarks on this passage will be found in the first section of chapter 10. It is also discussed and translated by James W. Laine (1989: 40–42 and 79–100).

¹⁰⁵ Agrawala 1956.

¹⁰⁶ The thought of this dialogue has been analysed by Biardeau in Biardeau and Malamoud 1976: 135ff., and more briefly by Laine (1991: 276–9). Mārkanḍeya's vision at the *pralaya* is discussed and translated by Laine (1989: 163–64 and 175–190).

¹⁰⁷ Lommel 1955–58. Recent studies of the episode include Brad Weiss (1985), Vidyut Aklujkar (1991), and Konrad Meisig (1994).

divided views about its place in the growth of the epic. For most of those who adopt a structuralist approach it provides one of the main keys to unlocking the meaning of the *Mahābhārata* and revealing the deepest identities of its heroes, and so it cannot be a mere accretion to the basic story.¹⁰⁸ For many older scholars, such as Hopkins, its later character was obvious and for more recent scholars concerned with text-historical and linguistic issues its lateness is also undeniable; for example, van Buitenen, while arguing for a middle position in which the question of what is interpolated is followed by the question of why it was, unequivocally accepts that it is an addition to the basic narrative.¹⁰⁹ The essentially classical pattern of versification seen in the book is in itself ample witness to its relative lateness. Nevertheless, its inclusion within the epic provided a place for the carnival-style inversion of roles, with its rich possibilities for the comic, which gives a welcome relief to and foil for the impending preparations for war in the next book. The image of Arjuna as the eunuch Br̥hannadā is indeed ludicrous.¹¹⁰ To assert that this material is a later development is not to deny the rich symbolic meanings that have been identified but rather to affirm that they have grown out of the basic narrative and act as a counterpoint to it. Equally, as Shulman has recognised, there is a dark undercurrent to the surface gaiety and the Pāñḍavas and Draupadī are frequently burning with resentment at various humiliations; and yet even in these situations there is an element which is reminiscent of the burlesque and obscene which still characterises many Indian festivals such as Holī. If the incident of Arjuna as Br̥hannadā persuading Uttara to fight the marauding Kauravas is indeed a self-conscious parody of the opening of the *Bhagavadgītā*, then this episode at least must be relatively late, if the arguments to be presented below about that text are accepted. Textually, the *Virāṭaparvan* shows wider divergence between the Northern and Southern recensions than usual.

By contrast, the *Udyogaparvan* has relatively few lengthy insertions in either recension and in general the two recensions are not as divergent as in the *Ādi* or *Virāṭa parvans*.¹¹¹ Amiya Dev provides an

¹⁰⁸ Dumézil (1968–73: I, 93–94), Biardeau (1968–78: V, 187–200), Hiltebeitel (1980) and Shulman (1985: 256–269) have all adopted this stance.

¹⁰⁹ *Mahābhārata* 1973–78: III, 18–21.

¹¹⁰ So too is Biardeau's attempted etymology of the name to link it with Nara (1984 and 1985: 3).

¹¹¹ Cf. S. K. De in the introduction to the Critical Edition (*Mahābhārata* 1933–66:

interesting analysis of the book in terms of the interrelation of war preparations and peace efforts.¹¹² He suggests that ‘the most insistent question’ is about Kṛṣṇa’s motives, whether he wants war or peace, and notes that in the *Śrīparvan* in the context of Gāndhāri’s curse Kṛṣṇa’s responsibility during the war is accepted; though not directly relating to issues of dating or the growth of the epic, this essay does much to establish the overall structure of the book, characterised by the ambiguity that Dev regards as typifying the *Mahābhārata*. The book also contains several episodes that have been separately studied for their content: Indra’s brahmanicide in the slaughter of Triśiras or Viśvarūpa (5.9–18) analysed by Shulman, within which occurs a version of the Nahuṣa story (5.11–17) examined by Hiltebeitel who interprets the symbolic connections between the Nahuṣa and Yayāti stories, the *Vidurāputrānuśāsana* (5.131–4) identified by Jacobi as part of a lost epic of the Sindhu and Sauvīra tribes, and the story of Ambā (5.170–193), studied by Morton Smith and by Rosalind Lefeber.¹¹³ Smith makes primarily a literary study of the story of Ambā, with reference to other versions, coming to the conclusion that the story was written by one author, with two interpolators adding further material. A stylistic peculiarity of the *Ambośākhyāna* is that it contains virtually half the total number of hypermetric *pādas* in the entire book (13 out of 27). Agrawala argues that both the *Mātaliwarānvesaṇa* (5.94–103) and the *Gālavacarita* (5.104–121) were added in the Gupta period, adducing as evidence the glorification of Nara and Nārāyaṇa, the mention of Nārada (5.103.35) and of Hayagrīva (5.97.5), the linking of Garuḍa and Viṣṇu, a description of the quarters similar to the search party account in the *Rāmāyaṇa* (5.107–110), the mention of Harimedhas and his daughter Dhvajavatī who stationed herself in the sky on the orders of Sūrya, seen with some justification as an allusion to Ahura Mazdāh and the Xvarnah (5.108.13), and the final *phalaśruti* (5.121.22).¹¹⁴

The ‘well-nigh interminable sermon’, as van Buitenen calls it, with which Vidura whiles away Dhṛtarāṣṭra’s sleepless night, the *Prajāgara-*

VI, xxv). He also assesses the reasons for some of the divergences of reading in terms of avoidance of solecism, removal of archaism, elimination of hiatus and regularisation of metrically defective lines (VI, xxxi–xxxiii).

¹¹² Dev 1989.

¹¹³ Shulman 1985: 220–28; Hiltebeitel 1976–77; Jacobi 1903b; Smith 1955; Lefeber 1994.

¹¹⁴ Agrawala 1956.

parvan (5.33–41), has been studied less than most didactic passages, although A. R. G. Tiwari has presented its teachings on cultural and political institutions and suggested a date for it in the 3rd century A.D., while van Buitenen suggests that the rationale for its inclusion is a new sense of the horror of the war.¹¹⁵ The high proportion of verses paralleled elsewhere in the *Udyogaparvan* suggest strongly that it is a late part of this book, while the parallels with 1.87, 2.57, 3.202 and 12.288, among others, are indicative of very late eclectic borrowing from throughout the *Mahābhārata*; it also contains a high proportion of proverbs and a large number of verses in common with the extant *Manusmṛti*. Rather more studies have been made of the following *Sanatsujātīya* (5.42–45). V. M. Bedekar presents its contents thematically and proposes that it is older than the *Bhagavadgītā*, not contemporary with it, as argued by Telang, while V. G. Rahurkar asserts that it must be pre-Buddhistic and contemporaneous with the *Bhagavadgītā*, being an embodiment of the same religious movement that is represented by the *Bhagavadgītā* and the *Upaniṣads*, and argues from its language and style that ‘provisionally one can fix the second century B.C. as *terminus ad quem* for the date of the *Sanatsujātīya*.’¹¹⁶ The *Sanatsujātīya* is probably one of the earliest of the philosophical passages to be included in the *Mahābhārata*; its text shows a great deal of confusion, which is by no means eliminated even in the Critical Edition, and this may well be an indication of its relatively early date and its popularity. In its case, the borrowings come from the older literature, especially in *adhyāya* 45, which contains reminiscences of *Atharvaveda* 11.4.20ab, *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 5.1, *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* 6.9 and 17ab (the last two also found in the *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* at 4.20 and 3.13ab), as well as the simile of the well in a flood found also in the *Bhagavadgītā* (5.45.23 and BhG. 2.46).

The issue of the relationship of the *Bhagavadgītā* to the rest of the *Bhīṣmaparvan* has tended to oust discussion of other parts of this book’s contents, but S. K. Belvalkar, its editor for the Critical Edition, has examined some episodes. He compares the cosmographical episode which prefaces the start of the war (6.6–13) and that in the *Padma Purāna* (1.3–9 in the Ānandāśrama edition, 3.3–9 in the Venkateshwara

¹¹⁵ *Mahābhārata* 1973–78: III, 180–81 (further characterising it caustically but aptly as ‘Vidura’s relentlessly incessant rainy-season pitter-patter of peanuts of wisdom’) and Tiwari 1958.

¹¹⁶ Telang in *Bhagavadgītā* 1882; Bedekar 1977–78; Rahurkar 1984–86.

Press edition); in opposition to Luise Hilgenberg, who not only showed that the close relationship between the texts ruled out their being independent but also claimed that the *Mahābhārata* account is based on the *Padma Purāṇa* account (and that both are based on the second of Kirfel's text groups), Belvalkar determines, mainly by analysis of the use of vocatives, that in all probability the *Padma Purāṇa* adapted the *Mahābhārata* passage, which he suggests on the basis of its lack of logical sequence may well be earlier than that in the more systematised *Purāṇas*.¹¹⁷ Belvalkar also examines the repetition of the episode where Kṛṣṇa prepares to kill Bhīṣma and is prevented by Arjuna; he shows that contextual evidence indicates that the first occasion (6.55, on the third day of the battle) is the later, whereas textual criticism indicates that the second occasion (6.102, on the ninth day) is secondary; and proposes to resolve the problem by supposing that the third, not the ninth day was ‘in an earlier stage of the Epic, the penultimate day of Bhīṣma’s Generalship’.¹¹⁸ This would obviously have considerable further implications for the shape and extent of the *Bhīṣmaparvan* which Belvalkar does not enlarge on, however. He does note, in the introduction to the Critical Edition, that the *Bhīṣmaparvan* has a particularly low proportion of added lines and suggests that the presence of the *Bhagavadgītā* may have acted as a check on expansion of the rest of the book.¹¹⁹ On the other hand, the *Vīśvopākhyāna* (61.30–64.18) contains an explicit reference to the Pāñcarātra doctrine of the four *vyūhas* (61.65–66, cf. also 62.39), which is clearly later than the *Bhagavadgītā*.

It is implausible that the *Bhagavadgītā*, at least in its present form, was a part of the original narrative and there is clear textual evidence for the process of insertion. It is quite likely that it originated as a separate composition, since it not only presupposes the epic setting but also contains within itself a reasonably full statement of Arjuna’s dilemma (superfluous in its present context but required for an independent work). Indeed Georg von Simson has demonstrated

¹¹⁷ Hilgenberg 1934; Belvalkar 1939. Among other points, it may be noted that the description of Hari and his eight-wheeled vehicle at 6.9.15–16 has no counterpart in the *Purāṇas*.

¹¹⁸ Belvalkar 1945. The other articles in this series (1944–45a and b, 1950/52) take up smaller textual issues arising from his editing of the *Bhīṣmaparvan*.

¹¹⁹ See *Mahābhārata* 1933–66: VII, cxxv–vi, where the percentage of added lines is given for the first six books as: *Ādi-parvan* 67.7%, *Sabhā-parvan* 95.3%, *Āranyakaparvan* 19.7%, *Virātapaṭparvan* 121.8%, *Udyogaparvan* 13.6% and *Bhīṣmaparvan* 13.2%.

the mechanisms by which the *Bhagavadgītā* was included within the *Mahābhārata* and has shown that the repetition in Mbh. 6.95.4–23 of Mbh. 6.16.11–20+42.2 reveals that originally the whole block from 16.21 to 42.1 was absent;¹²⁰ this includes most of the more extended *Bhagavadgītāparvan* (Mbh. 6.14–41), where the prediction of Bhīṣma's death and of the mourning for him in some sense provides a specific rationale for Arjuna's revulsion. There are in fact two stages of interpolation: the first after 6.16.20 provides the connection between Duryodhana's speech and Duḥśāsana's reaction to it and, through Dhṛtarāṣṭra's question at the end of *adhyāya* 22, forms a transition to the actual start of the battle at *adhyāya* 42; at this point the second stage of interpolation inserts the *Bhagavadgītā* (Mbh. 6.23–40) and the visit of the Pāṇḍavas to Bhīṣma and the gurus, before taking up again in 6.42.1 the bridging question by Dhṛtarāṣṭra from the first stage of interpolation. A significant indicator of this process is the extent to which 6.18 borrows from elsewhere in the *parvan*, not only from 6.42 but also from later in the book.¹²¹ The first insertion (6.16.21–22.22) clearly occurred as part of the great revision of the *Mahābhārata* to which we owe the account of the battle in its present form, whereas the *Bhagavadgītā* is revealed by its preamble in 1.2–19, which draws on 6.47.2–30, to be later still.¹²² Also, the visit of the Pāṇḍavas to the enemy (6.41), following the *Bhagavadgītā*, forms a late piece of brāhmaṇ apogetic, which equally with the second visit to Bhīṣma (6.103.40–84) must have been inserted for the moral justification of the Pāṇḍavas.

The usual dating of the *Bhagavadgītā* to about the 2nd century B.C. seems to be based on the one hand on the recognition of its secondary status within the *Mahābhārata* and on the other hand on general assumptions about the early development of Vaiṣṇavism. However, the linguistic and stylistic features of the *Bhagavadgītā* suggest a considerably later date, more like the 1st century A.D., at least in comparison with the other epic, the *Rāmāyaṇa*. The frequency, for example, of the periphrastic future is much closer to that in the *Bāla* and *Uttara kāṇḍas* of the *Rāmāyaṇa* than to that in the core books. Indeed, its use

¹²⁰ von Simson 1969.

¹²¹ Thus, 6.18.2ab, 31, 11ab correspond to 42.9ab, 10a, 16ab, while 18.12cd, 13ab, 13cd, 14ab are identical to 114.76cd, 77ab, 76ab, 77cd (and 18.13cd+12cd also to 102.7) and 18.17 is similar to 19.29.

¹²² On this point, besides von Simson's article, see van Buitenen 1965: 102, and the Critical Apparatus and Critical Notes to 6.47.

of the secondary conjugations is markedly different from the rest of the *Bhīṣmaparvan* and suggests an even later style than that of the *Bāla* and *Uttara kāṇḍas*, although the frequency of the substitute form for the perfect participle made with the suffix *-vat* added to the past participle passive is intermediate between the core of the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Bāla* and *Uttara kāṇḍas*. Such linguistic criteria suggest that the *Bhagavadgītā* should be assigned to roughly the same date as the *Bāla* and *Uttara kāṇḍas*, the 1st–3rd centuries A.D.¹²³ The style of the text also seems more consistent with the later epic style, which tends to greater use of poetic devices such as concatenation, anaphora and the use of refrains (all of which are frequent in the *Bhagavadgītā*) and the piling up of formulaic elements without regard to their aptness. For example, M. B. Emeneau has argued that 6.5a–7a (in which forms of *ātman* occur 15 times in these 5 lines) is predominantly formulaic in character and that ‘some of it is awkward, if not actually a bad fit in the passage’.¹²⁴ The question of its internal structure and consistency will be dealt with in chapter 5, along with its teachings.

The battle books (books 6–9) in general share a number of features which distinguish them from the preceding books and even more from the succeeding books, particularly in the area of formulaic dictio[n]; von Simson has demonstrated this, for example, by analysis of two specific types of formulaic expression—enumerations of troop formations and vocatives addressed to Dhṛtarāṣṭra—in relation to the transition from formulaic to non-formulaic language.¹²⁵ He found that non-formulaic enumerations of troop formations seem to belong to younger passages, essentially to interpolations, and that the frequency of the formulaic vocatives is lower in younger passages but is significantly affected by the subject matter. Elsewhere, von Simson has examined in more detail part of the *Dronaparvan*, the *Ghaṭotkacavadha-parvan* (7.122–154).¹²⁶ He demonstrates that the duel between Ghaṭotkaca and Aśvatthāman in 7.131 borrows extensively from the duel between the same opponents in 7.141 and that between Karṇa and

¹²³ See Brockington 1984, especially chapter 2. Fuller details of the material in this paragraph will be found in my 1997 paper.

¹²⁴ Emeneau 1968: 273; Emeneau affirmed that ‘even such an incomplete collection as I have at hand shows that more than two-thirds of the material in the first two verses of the passage is formulaic.’ To his data can be added the identity of 6.5b with Mbh. 12.128.17d.

¹²⁵ von Simson 1982.

¹²⁶ von Simson 1990.

Ghaṭotkaca in 7.150, but also draws on the description of the battle field in 7.136, on the description of the Rāksasa Alambusa in 7.142 and on 7.145; he illustrates the tendency for the author of 7.131 to prefer less common words and expressions for the formulaic expressions that had to be replaced in the borrowed passages, as well as his use of a number of long compounds in the description of the river of blood flowing on the battlefield (7.131.119–124b). More generally, there are indications that the *Dronaparvan* has undergone rather more expansion than the other battle books and it also shows a slightly different pattern of formulaic *pādas*; there are obvious reasons why *dronānīkam upādravat* should occur only in this book, but it should be noted that *śatena nataparvanā(m)* is also exclusive to it, and several more are commoner in it than anywhere else (*anyonyam abhijaghnatuḥ, krodhasamraktalocana, tadādbhutam iwābhavat, tan mamācakṣva samjaya, śūrāṇām anivartinām*). The avoidance of hiatus in the *Dronaparvan* compared with some other books was noted above and is no doubt linked with its rather later date overall.¹²⁷ Three extensive episodes, the legend of Mṛtyu, that of Śrījaya and his son Suvarṇaśthīvin, and the *Sodaśārājakiya*, which all appear in the *Sāntiparvan* (as 12.29, 30–31 and 248–50), have rightly been excised from the text (appearing as App. 8).

The very substantial divergence between the Northern and Southern recensions of *adhyāyas* 1–2 of the *Karṇaparvan* suggested to its editor, P. L. Vaidya, that they—and by implication all the first five *adhyāyas*—were added later as part of a remodelling of the battle books to provide a description of the contents of the book.¹²⁸ Hiltebeitel makes a comparison between the combat between Arjuna and Karṇa in the *Karṇaparvan* (8.22–67) and Cúchulainn's combat with Fer Diad in the *Táin Bó Cuailnge*, seeing both as deriving from an Indo-European background.¹²⁹ Although this suggests that an archaic element has been preserved here (and the version of the *Tripyropākhyāna* occurring at 8.24 seems earlier than the brief version at 7.173.52–58), a late date for at least one aspect of the narrative is indicated, in the light of the evidence given above, by Ruben's persuasive suggestion that the insults directed at Karṇa by Śalya (who has reluctantly agreed to

¹²⁷ In relation to its dating the following comment by Hopkins (1889a: 227) is worth noting: ‘Holtzmann would reduce the eighteen days of fighting described by our present Epic to three; but there seems to me no necessity for rejecting Drona entirely, although this *parvan* has been greatly expanded and filled in with repetitions.’

¹²⁸ *Mahābhārata* 1933–66: X (*Karṇaparvan* 1954), 676–77.

¹²⁹ Hiltebeitel 1982. For a study of the figure of Karṇa, see Shulman 1985: 380–87.

act as his charioteer for this combat), which culminate in a slanging match between the two, constitute a kind of caricature of the relationship between Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna in the *Bhagavadgītā*.¹³⁰ Equally, the style of Śalya's abuse at one point may be compared with Sītā's invective against Rāvaṇa (8.27.50–52 and Rām. 3.45.40–45).

The *Śalyaparvan* is divided in many Devanāgarī manuscripts of the Northern recension into two distinct books, a *Śalyaparvan* (containing 9.1–28 of the Critical Edition) and a *Gadāparvan* (containing 9.29–64), each of which has its own separate manuscript tradition. This is in conflict with the testimony of the Southern recension (and also the Ś, K and B versions of the Northern recension), which recognise a single *Śalyaparvan* subdivided into four: *Śalyavadha* (9.1–16), *Hradapra-veśa* (17–28), *Tirthayātrā* (29–53) and *Gadīyuddha parvans* (54–64). The relatively late date of the *Tirthayātrāparvan* is shown by its parallels not only with the better known *Tirthayātrāparvan* in the *Āranyakaparvan* but also with other passages.¹³¹ There is also considerable repetition of subject matter within it between *adhyāyas* 32 and 57 (and even a degree of verbal repetition between 32.33–52 and 55.25–44).

The *Sauptikaparvan*, despite its relative brevity, has a significant role in narrating the horrific sequel to the war itself in the night attack, from which the book takes its name. Hiltebeitel, after extended analyses of the views of Dumézil and Biardeau on the eschatological symbolism underlying the *Mahābhārata*, seeks to show that the *Sauptikaparvan* is structured on the myth of Dakṣa's sacrifice, enumerating fourteen specific points of resemblance, and to present Abhimanyu as the equivalent of the Norse Baldr, linking Baldr's reappearance as ruler of the renewed world with Kṛṣṇa's reviving of Abhimanyu's still-born child.¹³² Ruth Katz similarly sees the characters here as participants at the eschatological turning point of cosmic history.¹³³ She stresses that all the surviving Pāñcāla allies of the Pāṇḍavas are slaughtered by Aśvatthāman and his helpers (the five Draupadeyas being also linked with the Pāñcālas by the use of their metronymic), noting the significance of the Pāñcālas in the oldest aspects of the story, but

¹³⁰ Ruben 1941b: 221.

¹³¹ Thus, 9.32.4 is similar to 9.57.3cd–4, 32.33–52 resembles 9.55.25–44, 37.34–39 parallel 3.81.98–115, 9.50.47 is identical to 3.113.12, 9.52.20cd and 13c–14b are similar to 9.54.5cd–6, and 9.53.26–29 are similar to 9.28.30–52, the last of which may be significant for the process of inclusion of the whole passage.

¹³² Hiltebeitel 1972–73.

¹³³ Katz 1985.

suggests that the Hindu devotional aspect of the epic takes over in the person of Parikṣit, who depends on Kṛṣṇa for his life, thereby indicating its relative lateness in the development of the epic, revealed also by the way that the book is structured around the myth of the *pralaya* with Aśvatthāman playing the role of Śiva. Aśvatthāman is indeed elsewhere said to be born from a mixture of Mahādeva, Antaka, Krodha and Kāma (1.61.66) and has a vision of Śiva before the slaughter (10.6–7).¹³⁴ Katz therefore considers that the composers of the *Sauptikaparvan* were committed devotees of Viṣṇu, since they substituted a devotional version of the epic conflict for the heroic one, and that they belonged to the court of Janamejaya, since one of the major concerns in the book is to establish the position of Janamejaya's father, Parikṣit; accordingly, she suggests that they may have been either Pāñcarātrins or more probably followers of a pre-Pāñcarātra form of Vaiṣṇavism, noting that the two sages who dominate the Pāñcarātrin *Nārāyaṇīya*, Nārada and Vyāsa, also play major roles in the *Sauptikaparvan*.

The *Strīparvan* has been subjected to little critical scrutiny and in many ways it simply forms an epilogue to the dramatic events of the previous books. However, it does present certain issues, particularly in regard to the status of Vidura's philosophisings (11.2–7), which in effect means the whole of the *Viśokaparvan* (11.1–8). The editor of the book for the Critical Edition, V. G. Paranjpe, argues for the authenticity of the *Viśokaparvan* but the points adduced are not conclusive.¹³⁵ Vidura's discourse includes the well-known allegory of the man in the well (11.5–6), which has been translated into Japanese and studied by Hara along with the related stories of Jaratkāru (1.41), Uttanika (1.3) and the honey guarded by snakes (5.62).¹³⁶

In relation to the original extent of the *Śāntiparvan*, it is relevant to note that one manuscript, T2, inserts a part-dated colophon to the whole book at the end of *adhyāya* 320 (although it does continue with the *Nārāyaṇīya*, 12.321–339, probably copied from another manuscript).

¹³⁴ Aśvatthāman's vision is discussed and translated by Laine (1989: 117–26 and 152–58); Shulman discusses the *Sauptika* episode (1985: 129–39), and looks at 10.17 among other passages in a later article (1986–87).

¹³⁵ *Mahābhārata* 1933–66: XII (*Strīparvan*, 1956), xxiii–xxvi. He also in the Critical Notes to 11.1.2 (p. 115) gives the following list of grammatically irregular forms in the book: *tapyāmi* 1.15b, *utpādayitvā* 1.32a, *anuśayati* 2.22a, *dehāni* 3.5a, *swargam* 3.8a, *avaropyantam* 3.10a, *ucyati* 6.5a, *gṛhya* 11.17a, *vilapanṭi* 16.59c, *abruvam* 17.6c, as well as two instances of irregular sandhi, *prāptottare* 4.7a and *ayasmayam* 11.17b.

¹³⁶ Hara 1985.

There is probably a broad progression in terms of chronology from the *Rājadharmaparvan* (12.1–128) through the *Āpaddharmaparvan* (12.129–167) to the *Mokṣadharmaparvan* (12.168–353), but effectively each passage, often of one or two *adhyāyas* at a time, must—even more than in other books—be examined individually, since the material is only loosely integrated into these major units. Occasionally the exceptional length of an *adhyāya* suggests that the passage has been incorporated at a particularly late stage, since otherwise it would have been divided into several *adhyāyas*; likely instances of this include the *Sodaśarājakīya* (12.29), the *Bhīṣmataravāra* (12.47), four different *samvādas* in succession at 12.136–9, the *Balivāsavasamvāda* and the *Śrīvāsavasamvāda* (12.220 and 221), the *Sulabhājanakasamvāda* (12.308) and the *Yāvakādhyāya* (12.309, which also shows a late metrical pattern, as noted above). One of the earliest passages to be studied in detail textually was the *Kapilagosamvāda* (12.260–262), of which Friedrich Weinrich produced a critical edition.¹³⁷ More recently the *Tulādhārajājalisamvāda* (12.252–257) has been subjected to careful examination by Ian Proudfoot and a plausible scheme for the stages of its development presented, which includes the suggestion that as much as a fifth of the text should have been relegated to the status of * passages.¹³⁸ The *Nārāyanīya* (12.321–339) is clearly one of the later parts even of the *Śāntiparvan* and is probably no earlier than the 3rd century A.D.; it reveals its lateness mainly by its contents, which will be discussed more fully in the penultimate section of the fifth chapter, but also in other ways; for example, the occurrence of the prose *stotra* at 12.325 and another of the few prose passages in the whole epic at 12.329 were noted above, while several of its *adhyāyas* are exceptionally long (particularly 326–28 but to a lesser extent 335–37).¹³⁹

The *Anusāsanaparvan* divides very unevenly into the *Dānadharmaparvan* (13.1–152), a fourth section of Bhīṣma's teaching parallel to the three contained in the *Śāntiparvan*, and the *Bhīṣmasvargārohanaparvan* (13.153–154). The same considerations apply to the first of these as to the *Śāntiparvan* (presupposed in its opening words: *sāntir uktā twayānagha*, 13.1.2b) but the account of the actual death of Bhīṣma may well belong to an appreciably earlier stage of the epic's growth. Shee notes

¹³⁷ Weinrich 1928.

¹³⁸ Proudfoot 1987.

¹³⁹ In addition to the complete French translation of the vulgate by Anne-Marie Esnoul (1979), 12.337 (in which Vyāsa's identity with Nārāyaṇa is proclaimed) has been translated by Sullivan (1990b).

the story at 13.10 of a *śūdra* who lives an ascetic life, making offerings to the gods and even undertaking the *pitrkārya*, and thus gains so much merit that in his next existence he is reborn as a king; she argues that the story shows unmistakable younger features and lacks the older characteristics of *tapas* as a kind of magic.¹⁴⁰ Vassilkov suggests that the story of Aṣṭāvakra, sent to the Himālaya by his teacher (13.19–22), reproduces the sequence of ritual acts in a *dīkṣā*, which would tend to suggest a fairly early date for this passage.¹⁴¹ Indra's theft of the lotus-stalks (13.94–96) has been compared with its parallel versions in the *Bisajātaka*, *Jātakamālā*, *Padma Purāṇa* and *Skanda Purāṇa* by Rosa Klein-Terrada, who traces their development from a single, original *Asketen-dichtung*, while Minoru Hara adds a comparison of the ascetics' exculpatory oaths with those of Bharata in the *Rāmāyaṇa* (2.69).¹⁴² On the other hand, there is an unusually large amount of material relegated to Appendix I (considerably more than ten thousand lines), which is an indication of how the process of expansion continued freely until a late date. In addition, a number of episodes or myths are narrated again here as well as in previous books—the story of Viśvāmitra and Rāma Jāmadagnya (13.4 and 52–56, cf. 3.115–117 and 12.49), the Kārttikeya episode (13.83–86, cf. 9.43–45), the story of Nahuṣa (13.102–3, cf. 5.11–17 and 12.329) and the legend of the Aśvins and Cyavana (13.141, cf. 3.123)—and in every case the version in this book appears secondary. Although this book may not have been regarded as separated from the *Śāntiparvan* until late, there is no reason to suppose that it is as late as the 11th–13th century, the date noted above as being claimed for it by Pisani.

The *Āśvamedhikāparvan* as a whole is relatively late and the small number of * passages is just one indication of this, while another is perhaps the degree of self-reference to the text (*mahābhāratayuddhamtat*, 14.60.1c, and *mahābhāratayuddhe* 82.8a). The book is dominated by the *Anugītā* (14.16–50), the repeat discourse by Kṛṣṇa to Arjuna, which generally, despite some echoes of wording from elsewhere in the *Mahābhārata* and from *Manusmṛti*,¹⁴³ seems to be similar in style at times to some *Upaniṣads* and at other times to classical philosophical texts rather than to the *Bhagavadgītā*, its supposed basis. It appears in

¹⁴⁰ Shee 1986: 229.

¹⁴¹ Vassilkov 1995.

¹⁴² Klein-Terrada 1980 and Hara 1987.

¹⁴³ 14.12.1–14 (the whole *adhyāya*) is almost identical to 12.16.8–24; *nirmamo*

fact to be an insertion within an originally much shorter *parvan*, since 14.62 resumes in effect from the end of 14.8, picking up the narrative of Marutta's gold, thus eliminating not only the *Anugītā* (14.16–50) but also the Samvarta-Indra episode before it and the Uttarka episode and Kṛṣṇa's narrating of the battle which follow it. Similarly, within that insertion *adhyāyas* 55–57 are probably a further insertion, since 4.58.1 takes up from the end of 4.54. The *Anugītā* contains a significant amount of ritual vocabulary, for example *samskāra*, *svadhākāra*, *svāhākāra*, *vasat̄kriyā* in *adhyāya* 37 and also *yajñopavītin*, *kālacakra* and *naiṣkarmya* (14.45–46). There is quite frequent mention of Viṣṇu, in contrast to the *Bhagavadgītā*, as well as of Nārāyaṇa (at 14.25.16bc, 17c and 98* 2). A typically late feature is the amount of repetition, of which the most striking is the degree of internal parallelism in *adhyāyas* 22–24 (including 23.8 = 11 = 14 = 17 = 20, but cf. 63.3ab = 74.7ab = 4.59.3ab elsewhere in the *Āśvamedhikāparvan*). Nevertheless, Bedekar discusses a verse in the *Anugītā* where 'the formation of an embryo in the womb is compared to the formation of an image cast in the mould' (14.18.8) as an early reference to the technique and quite implausibly suggests dating the verse 'into the third century before Christ'.¹⁴⁴

There are considerable similarities of wording between Daśaratha's *āśvamedha* in the *Rāmāyaṇa* and Yudhiṣṭhīra's *āśvamedha* in the *Āśvamedhikāparvan*—Rām. 1.13.4–7, 15–22, 25cd, 29–31 may be compared to Mbh. 14.90.20–22, 24–30, 34cd, 91.3–5—but probably because both depend on *sūtra* descriptions; it is significant that the nucleus of the sacrificial action is contained in 91.1–6.¹⁴⁵ Certainly there is extensive use of Vedic ritual terms and frequent assertions that it is being performed in accordance with the rules (*vidhivat*, *yathāvidhi*, etc.).

The *Āśramavāsikāparvan* provides the first of a series of epilogues which in all probability were added to the main story significantly

nirahankārah at 14.38.5a, 44.21c, 46.43c, 47.9c, 14c, App. 3.9 pr., occurs also at 6.24.71c, 34.13c, 12.152.30c, 215.29a and 13.111.5a, *nirmamo nirahankṛtaḥ* at 14.40.7d, 50.22b and 24b occurs also at 12.152.26d and 295.36f, so *ṁṛtavīya kalpate* at 14.48.2d (cf. 5d) occurs also at 1.86.17d, 6.24.15d, 12.137.76d and 231.22d, and *brahmabhūyāya kalpate* at 14.47.8d occurs also at BhG. 14.26d and 18.53d and Mbh. 12.154.25d, 208.19d, 243.7d, 13.128.31d, 130.33d, 131.56d; in addition 14.48* echoes BhG. 13.13cd. Similar verses to the *Manusmṛti* are 45.13 cf. *Manu* 6.87, 45.18 cf. *Manu* 4.177, 50.14 (= Mbh. 12.155.2) cf. *Manu* 11.242, and 50.15–17 cf. *Manu* 11.236–8 (for 16 cf. also Mbh. 12.155.4).

¹⁴⁴ Bedekar 1965.

¹⁴⁵ For a comparison of the two descriptions see Koskikallio 1995.

later. As its editor Belvalkar has remarked, the addition of a *phalaśruti* at 15.41.26–28 clearly indicates that the *Putradarśanaparvan* (15.36–44) is a very late addition to the book, which is confirmed by the shift from the level of narrative by Vaiśampāyana to Janamejaya to the outermost layer of the *sūta*'s narrative to Śaunaka in *adhyāyas* 42–43.¹⁴⁶

The remaining three books are all generally regarded as being late and in any case are extremely short, all containing less than ten *adhyāyas*; indeed, it is most likely that they have been treated as separate books only at a very late date, in order to produce the significant number 18 for the total of the books. The *Mausalaparvan* in some ways anticipates the *Hariwamśa* in its focus on Kṛṣṇa and the Yādavas. The *Mahāprasthānikaparvan* cannot really be separated from the final book, the *Svargārohaṇaparvan*, in terms of its narrative; the dating suggested by Darmesteter that was noted above is if anything too early. The *Svargārohaṇaparvan*, as noted in relation to the *Ādīparvan*, deliberately repeats in its final *adhyāya* several verses from 1.56 to provide a balance to the opening of the epic, revealing that it is among the latest passages in the whole work. Equally, the portrayal of Yudhiṣṭhira in this book turns him even more into an embodiment of brāhmaṇical Hinduism by emphasising the questioning philosopher—the brāhmaṇ influence by now extending to the narrative element.

The process of transformation seems in the case of both epics to be linked with passing from the hands of their traditional reciters, the *sūtas* and *kuśilavas*, into those of the brāhmaṇs as the guardians of all traditional learning. In a seminal article, Sukthankar elucidates the role of the Bhārgavas in the amplification of the *Mahābhārata* and in particular its brahmanisation.¹⁴⁷ He goes through the text, section by section, noting the evidence for Bhārgava influence whenever it appears. For example, within the *Ādīparvan*, Sukthankar identified the *Aurovākhyāna* (1.169–173) with its Bhārgava hero as ‘a digression within a digression’; in the *Sabhāparvan* there are only brief mentions of Bhārgavas, usually included in lists of those present on various occasions, whereas the *Āranyakaparvan* has a considerable amount of Bhārgava material incorporated into it. The largest amount of Bhārgava material is included in the *Anusāsanaparvan*.

As his name Bhārgava indicates, Rāma Jāmadagnya is the hero of

¹⁴⁶ *Mahābhārata* 1933–66: XIX (*Āśramavāsikaparvan*, 1959), 155.

¹⁴⁷ Sukthankar 1936–37.

the Bhṛgu group of brāhmans, who were especially connected with the inflation of the *Mahābhārata* after supplanting the *sūtas* and through it with bolstering the claims to superiority of the brāhmans. The Bhārgava inflation was independent of, though not hostile to, that associated with the *Nārāyaṇīya*, which continued after the first had tapered off; so much so that the famous benedictory stanza, *nārāyaṇam namaskṛtya . . .*, of the popular editions drops out of the Critical Edition, but most of the purely Bhārgava inflations, such as extreme emphasis on Rāma Jāmadagnya, remain and Sukthankar thought that the *Mahābhārata* only passed from their control when the last four books were being added. Thus, Rāma Jāmadagnya's participation in epic events results from interpolation and accounts of his massacre of the *ksatriyas* are intended to emphasise Bhārgava control over the epic itself, reflecting not a military but a literary struggle. N. J. Shende, from a count of references to individual brāhmans, demonstrates the greater frequency of mention of the Āngirases, even than of the Bhṛgus.¹⁴⁸ To these may be added the narrative by Mārkanḍeya about the origin of the fires and the role of Āngiras as an Atharvan. Shende therefore modifies Sukthankar's hypothesis by suggesting that 'the Bhṛgvangirases were jointly responsible for the final redaction of the *Mahābhārata*'.

Hermann Weller, in a comment on Sukthankar's article, thought that the Bhṛgu brāhmans belonged to the 'Pre-Aryan-Indid' race, of whose conflicts with the Aryans the *Mahābhārata* 'contains undoubtedly historical reminiscences'.¹⁴⁹ Despite the outmoded terminology in which this suggestion is presented, the possibility that the Bhārgava brāhmans were originally of non-Aryan background cannot be dismissed too readily, both in the light of what is known about later groups such as the Maga brāhmans and from the picture presented of them in the *Mahābhārata*. Specifically, Weller suggests that *Rgveda* evidence reveals them as chariot-builders, which explains both their esteem as craftsmen and their links with fire. S. Bhattacharji has emphasised that the extant *Mānavadharmaśāstra* is ascribed to a Bhārgava redactor and suggests that both that text and the Bhārgava expansion of the *Mahābhārata* were composed during the early centuries A.D.

¹⁴⁸ Shende 1943a; in a companion paper (1943b) he studies the occurrences of the Bhṛgus and Āngirases in the *Rāmāyaṇa* and concludes that they also handled the *Rāmāyaṇa* when they were transforming the *Mahābhārata* and included in it the *Rāmopākhyāna*.

¹⁴⁹ Weller 1937.

She regards the *Ādi*, *Āranyaka*, *Drona*, *Śalya*, *Śānti* and *Anuśāsana parvans* as belonging largely and the last five *parvans* as belonging wholly to this expansion, which was built around an emphasis on Śiva and Kṛṣṇa and is characterised by the social demotion of women, as part of a general trend to conservative values induced by the invasions of the Kuṣāṇas and others: ‘The Kali age they portrayed was actually a picture of their contemporary society.’¹⁵⁰

Taking as his starting point Sukthankar’s discovery of the significance of the Bhārgavas, Goldman examines the major Bhārgava myths in the *Mahābhārata* and the *Matsya Purāna*.¹⁵¹ He emphasises that, while elements are occasionally borrowed from other myths, basically they form a closed cycle centred on certain recurrent themes, especially the relations of the Bhṛgus to the *ksatriyas* and their relations to the gods and other supernatural beings. He notes the characteristic ambivalence of Bhārgava myth and suggests that the authors are purposefully manipulating mythic elements to create ‘myth about myth’ or, to use his term, ‘metamyth’.

Hein studies the distribution of the phrase *sarvabhūtahite rataḥ* and its minor variants and analyses the contexts in which it occurs.¹⁵² The phrase is rarely applied to the gods (to Śiva at 12.149.110, to Indra at 13.30.3, and to Savitṛ at 3.160.2—but in the context of the sun’s daily beneficial appearance) and by no means automatically to brāhmaṇas, but serves in particular to characterise kings as one of the main royal virtues (and so is not related at all directly to non-violence). After studying the distribution of the phrase in both epics and noting its absence from books 2, 4, 7–11 and 15–18 (and from book 6 outside the *Bhagavadgītā*), Hein deduces that, since ‘the brutal Bhārgava attitude in human relations accords ill with the spirit of delighting in the welfare of all beings’, the phrase must be characteristic of a group of redactors independent of the Bhārgava editors identified by Sukthankar, whom he provisionally designates ‘the *brāhmaṇa* irenicists’ from their more conciliatory attitudes (of which the phrase studied forms an example). Which group of redactors was later cannot be determined and ‘the two groups apparently collaborated in the development of the Mahābhārata with only moderate tension.’

¹⁵⁰ Bhattacharji 1991–92: 482.

¹⁵¹ Goldman 1977.

¹⁵² Hein 1986.

Although this section on the growth and development of the *Mahābhārata* falls far short of establishing a continuous chronology for the process (and that is something which is certainly not yet attainable, if it ever will be), it has demonstrated that far more can be discerned than simply the division into narrative and didactic material which Hopkins affirmed. The evidence for this comprises partly the data on language, style and metre—inadequate as these often are—which were surveyed in the earlier sections of the chapter and partly considerations of internal coherence. In turn, greater understanding of the process of growth of the epic can illuminate the investigation of the historical and cultural data which form the subject matter of the next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE *MAHĀBHĀRATA* (2)

It is necessary to recognise that, since the epics reflect the outlook and the cultural and political interests of their composers and transmitters, the interests of other groups are not necessarily fully represented and may indeed have been deliberately excluded at times. The picture that we can draw of the culture and society of the period of their production is thus almost certainly not complete. To the extent that the transmission of both epics came to be dominated by brāhmaṇa groups, any study of them is inevitably to quite an extent a study of the propagation of brāhmaṇical ideals and brāhmaṇical culture. As Hopkins long ago pointed out and Romila Thapar in particular has more recently re-affirmed, there are substantial differences in the depiction of society and the economy in the two layers of the narrative and the didactic sections.¹ The apparent anomalies and even contradictions found in the *Mahābhārata* on such topics are to be explained in terms of its lengthy period of growth. This means that the epic has outgrown the limits of the heroic period in which it was set and has become the vehicle for further successive phases in the development of Indian culture.

Archaeology and the epic

As was noted briefly in the previous chapter, Indian archaeologists have sought to link the *Mahābhārata* events with the archaeological record of early India. B. B. Lal, in particular, proposed that the Painted Grey Ware and its associated culture was to be identified with the Aryans of the *Mahābhārata*; he noted its distribution over the upper Gangā valley, the Doab and the banks of the Satlej, the Sarasvatī-Dṛṣadvatī valley and western Rajasthan and argued that the actual sites were those mentioned in the *Mahābhārata*.² Indeed, he

¹ Hopkins 1889a: 70; Thapar 1979, and 1977–78.

² Lal 1973, 1981, and various other articles. Painted Grey Ware is a fine wheel-

claimed that a layer of flood debris identified at Hāstīnapura should be linked to mention of a flood in the epic. Painted Grey Ware was first found in excavations at Ahicchatra during 1940–44, but its significance was first claimed by Lal as a result of excavations at Hāstīnapura in 1955; Lal himself visited over thirty sites and almost all had in common the P. G. Ware in their lower levels.³ Since then excavators have added to the list of sites, which now range as far east as Vaiśālī in Bihar and south to Ujjain, and the main area of occupation seems to have been the eastern Panjāb and the central Gaṅgā valley.⁴ Significantly, the ware is found underlying such major urban centres as Kauśāmbī and Mathurā. Thus, the Painted Grey Ware culture occupied basically the same area as that postulated for late Vedic settlement.

Associated with this Painted Grey Ware pottery at Hāstīnapura and elsewhere were remains of rectangular mud or mud-brick houses, copper objects, bone tools and some iron objects. At first only copper and bronze were known to occur with the Painted Grey Ware but subsequently iron was found at various sites. The occurrence of iron objects as well as evidence of iron-working in the Painted Grey Ware levels of Hāstīnāpura, Alamgīrpur, Atrañjikhera, Kauśāmbī and Ujjain has led archaeologists to the conclusion that iron technology was introduced before 900 B.C. by the users of the Painted Grey Ware, who, because of the association of this pottery with sites that figure prominently in the *Mahābhārata*, are often thought to be Indo-Aryans, though probably belonging to a later wave of immigrants than those who composed the *Vedas*.

Broadly, the culture sequence revealed in excavations is as follows. In the second and third quarters of the second millennium, most sites produced a predominantly red ware which constitutes the last

turned pottery bearing geometric ornament in black on the exterior and occasionally the interior as well; the two distinctive shapes in this pottery are a deep, straight-sided bowl and a shallow convex-sided dish.

³ Lal 1954–55. A useful general survey of the evidence is contained in Allchin and Allchin 1982: 309–346.

⁴ The distribution of the Painted Grey Ware extends from the dry bed of the Ghaggar in Bahawalpur and north Rajasthan, eastwards across the watershed of the Gaṅgā and the Indus to the upper Doāb. In the Doāb it has been found in excavations or on the surface at such historically important sites as Panipat, Indraprastha (the Purāṇa Qila mound at Delhi), Mathurā, Bairāt and Sonpat. About 180 sites are heavily concentrated along the upper reaches of the Sarasvatī-Drṣadvatī in Patiala, Ambala and Kurukshetra districts; altogether over 650 sites have been found between the Jhelum and Yamunā rivers.

stage of pottery of Harappan or even Early Harappan tradition and is more or less identical with the so-called Ochre Coloured Pottery; this pottery was probably not made with a foot-wheel and, in the early period, not even with a spun-wheel; firing was mostly by a simple pit or bonfire. This Ochre Coloured Pottery was followed at many sites by a short period (perhaps c. 1100–900 B.C.) when much of the pottery consists of a black-and-red burnished ware; the earliest scrappy evidence of iron working comes from this period. This period is followed, in the northeastern part of the area, by a period in which the distinctive Painted Grey Ware gradually becomes commoner alongside the coarser red ware, and the black-and-red ware, where present, decreases. The third stage is dated by a fairly large number of radiocarbon samples from a number of sites yielding Painted Grey Ware and, quite often, iron, which suggest dates of c. 900–500 B.C.

Lal's views about the Painted Grey Ware were arrived at on the basis of its occurrence at the lowest levels of sites mentioned in the *Mahābhārata*. Its distribution may perhaps reflect an earlier phase when it was restricted to the Sarasvatī valley and sites in the watershed and then an extension into the Gaṅgā valley from the early first millennium B.C. The material culture associated with the Painted Grey Ware shows some affinities with textual descriptions from the later Vedic literature. The economy was farming and herding, with bones of domestic pig, buffalo, horse, cattle and sheep along with deer. The people were dependent on cattle for both dairy products and meat, grew wheat and rice, were familiar with the domestication of the horse and, in the later phases of the culture, made use of iron weaponry, while the absence of burials at any of the sites suggests that cremation was common practice. There is, however, still a problem in the identification of the Painted Grey Ware with the Aryans, since there are no links yet established between these settlements and those along the Indo-Iranian borderlands or further west. The attempt to identify the Aryans with archaeological remains is almost certainly doomed to failure in any case. The Aryans were not necessarily a distinct racial group who carefully carried a recognisable assemblage of material culture with them in their migrations; what is distinctive is the language and that has left no traces in the material remains.

This is not to say that the Painted Grey Ware culture and the first Indian use of iron has no relationship to the group or groups who produced the *Mahābhārata*. The number of sites mentioned in the

Mahābhārata that have been shown to have been settled by the users of the Painted Grey Ware is substantial. It is certainly quite possible that such sites were the home of various Aryan tribal kingdoms, who may well have known some version of the epic story and passed it on through the generations. However, the occupants of these sites lived in mud-walled huts, which are a far cry from the splendid palaces of the epic. This may be the background from which the epics evolved but it is a long way from establishing the historicity of the events of the *Mahābhārata* or from enabling us to correlate the archaeological and the literary records.

Indeed, the limitations of this claimed identification are very clearly illustrated by a more recent modification of the theory which may shed new light on the identity of some of the participants in the *Mahābhārata* narrative. Asko Parpola combines the textual and archaeological evidence to suggest that the Pāṇḍus or Pāṇḍavas may represent a new wave of Aryans arriving in northern and western India around the 8th or 9th century B.C. and that they can be distinguished by their Black-and-Red Ware from the later Vedic Aryans with their Painted Grey Ware.⁵ He argues that they were pushed southwards through Gujarat by the expansion of Magadha (seeing textual analogies in Krṣṇa's retreat from Mathurā to Dvārakā because of Jarāśamda) around the fifth century B.C. and that they may have belonged to the same wave of Iron Age immigrants who introduced the megalithic culture into the Deccan (with the legend of Rāma Jāmadagnya possibly preserving reminiscences of the migration routes involved). In this respect the presence of the Jaiminīya Nambūdiris nowadays in Kerala and the role of Jaimini as the *udgātr* at Janamejaya's snake sacrifice (1.48.6) and as one of Vyāsa's four pupils (1.57.74–75) may well be relevant.

Political and military aspects

As Thapar has noted, much of the narrative presents a picture relating to the period a little before the emergence of state systems.⁶ Political institutions are based as much on kinship as on social relationships, the major ritual remains the sacrifice in its various forms, and a

⁵ Parpola 1984.

⁶ Thapar 1984: 132–33.

mixed pastoral-agrarian economy is being practised, with an emphasis on clan holdings rather than the breaking up of land into private holdings. Despite all the complexities in the dynastic history of the last generation or two, the succession to the Kuru kingdom is emphatically restricted to the *kṣatriya* lineages. The situation among the Yādavas is more remote still from a state system: the Andhaka-Vṛṣnis were the ruling clan among them and Kṛṣṇa a prominent chief within the group. One characteristic of lineage society is the resort to migration to ease tension and conflict, particularly in relation to political power, and several instances of this are found in the *Mahābhārata*. Most notably the Pāñdavas build a new capital at Indraprastha and one group of the Andhaka-Vṛṣnis migrates from Mathurā to Dvārakā. Thapar indeed suggests that the frequency of exile is also partly linked with such fissiparous tendencies, asserting in a somewhat arbitrary fashion that the need for exile arises out of crises over legitimacy and power in both the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*.

In this kind of situation, the king was not an absolute monarch and the royal dynasty was essentially the dominant one among several prominent families; even so, on occasion the need for a king is put quite strongly, as when, for example, the death of Vicitravīrya without an heir results in drought, famine and disease for the people (5.145.24–27). The other nobles were required to pay tribute to the king and in time of war could be summoned to take command of the army or to serve as the king's supporters. Such nobles saw physical strength as one of a man's main assets, ate meat and drank alcohol freely. The king was advised by ministers, who were part of his household, while his main sources of wealth would have been tribute from other chiefs and the booty, especially cattle, won on military expeditions. In the didactic parts of the epic, however, the picture has altered greatly. The rule of large landowners and chieftains by personal authority has given way to a rigid administration under an all-powerful monarch and his ministers, with substantial taxes levied on the ordinary population to support the court and the army. The king himself lives in considerable luxury and large, well defended cities are described. The role of the brāhmaṇa in court life has developed from the limited one of *purohita*, court chaplain, who performed religious ceremonies on the king's behalf, to that of the expert in politics, who advises him on all matters (see for example 12.74–75 and 159).

Terms to denote political and administrative theory include *dandanīti* (for example at 3.149.31–32, 198.23c, 5.130.13–14 and frequently in

the *Śāntiparvan*), *rājadharma* (which occurs in other books besides the *Śāntiparvan*, for example at 1.102.17d, 12.59.74d, 136.39b, 259.9d, 14.65.24d) and *artha* (for example in *arthatattvavibhājñāḥ* at 3.158.13c and 159.17a, *arthavidyā* at 7.5.34b and 12.140.11c, *arthaśāstra* at 12.161.9b and 13.39.9b). In late parts of the *Āranyakaparvan* the rules of Brhaspati and Uśanas are mentioned (*brhaspatyuśanoktaś ca nayaḥ*, 3.149.29c) and Brhaspati's birth from Angiras is mentioned (3.207.17). The names of Brhaspati and Kāvya Uśanas (also known as Śukra and as Kāvya Bhārgava) as propounder of political theory are of course well known in other literature too; the legend of how Uśanas acquired his name Śukra is narrated at 12.278. In the *Śānti* and *Anuśāsana parvans* there is reference not only to *arthaśāstra* texts by Brhaspati and others (13.39.9) but also to a series of teachers of *rājadharma*: Brhaspati, Viśalākṣa, Kāvya, Sahasrākṣa Mahendra, Prācetasa Manu, Bharadvāja and Gauraśīras, collectively called *rājaśāstrapratīnetārah* (12.58.1–3). Similar to the latter is the derivation of teaching on *dharma*, *artha* and *kāma* from Brahmā's original code, successively abridged by Śiva Viśalākṣa, Puramīda, Brhaspati and Kāvya (12.59.86–91),⁷ and the attribution of a universal *śāstra* to a group of seven Citraśikhaṇḍins—Marīci, Atri, Angiras, Pulastyā, Pulaha, Kratu and Vasishtha (12.322.26–28)—from which come the works of Manu Svāyambhuva, Uśanas and Brhaspati (12.322.41–43). The work attributed to Prācetasa Manu is apparently called *Rājadharmaḥ* and two verses from it are cited (12.57.43–45, cf. *arthavidyām ca mānavīm* at 7.5.34b), while the *Kaniṅkaśatrūntapasamvāda* (12.138) contains a discourse on politics delivered by Kaniṅka Bhāradvāja, advising the king for example to avoid both desire and anger and to engage in conciliation until the opportune moment. Both Bhāradvāja and Viśalākṣa are cited together in the *Kauṭilya Arthaśāstra* (1.8.1–6 and 1.17.4–8), which also refers to the views of the Mānavas who may reasonably be linked with Prācetasa Manu. Vidura is quite often seen as offering political and other advice, which is no doubt the reason that the late *Viduranīti* (5.33–40, the major part of the *Prajāgaraparvan*) is attributed to him; Duryodhana cites Mātaṅga as saying that one should assert oneself and not bow down (5.125.19–20); Asita Devala is cited by Yudhiṣṭhira for the view that victory on the battlefield is superior to

⁷ The version by Puramīda (to be identified with Sahasrākṣa Mahendra, i.e. Indra) is termed the *Bāhudantaka* (12.59.89d) and so may perhaps be related to the *Bāhudantīputra* cited as an authority by the *Kauṭilya Arthaśāstra* (1.8.24–26).

that won with the dice (2.53.6–7); Utathya delivers a discourse on *kṣātradr̥harma* to king Māndhāṭṛ in the *Utathyagītā* (12.91–92) and Vāma-deva gives his views on the king's duties and mode of conduct—declaring that control of one's senses is greater than success in warfare—in the *Vāmadevagītā* (12.93–95); a certain Śambara is cited as recommending clemency to a defeated king (12.103.31–32); and the sage Kālavṛksīya discourses on the conduct of ministers (12.83) and on relations between kingdoms (12.105–7); but none of these can really be considered political thinkers. Equally the dialogue between Kāmanda and king Aṅgāriṣṭha (12.123) is basically a condemnation of *kāma* as a proper motivation and an endorsement of the *trayī vidyā*, the three Vedas, and has nothing to do with the *Kāmandakanītisāra*.

An account of the origins of kingship is given in 12.59: there was no kingship, no king, no punishment and no one needing punishment, since people protected each other through *dharma* (12.59.14) but with the decline in *dharma* people became evil, so eventually the gods, fearing complete chaos, appealed first to Brahmā, who propounded the concepts of the four *puruṣārthas* and of *rājadharma*, and then to Viṣṇu, who set in train the events that lead ultimately to the birth of Prthu, who becomes the first, ideal monarch; at this point a kind of social contract is made with him by the gods and sages on behalf of mankind (12.59.108–111), while because he pleased the people he is called *rājā* (*rañjitāś ca prajāḥ sarvāḥ tena rājeti śabdyate*, 12.59.127cd). Elsewhere, the dirge on the evils of kingless states (12.67.2–17, cf. Rām. 2.61) culminates in a reference to the *matsyanyāya*, the condition of society when the powerful prey on the weaker members (12.67.16, cf. 12.15.20–22, where bigger animals eat smaller ones); in 12.67 as a whole, the divine origin of kingship is again indicated by the story of how mankind, suffering from anarchy, came together, made an agreement to outlaw antisocial behaviour and asked Brahmā to appoint a protector for them, whereupon he approached Manu, who reluctantly agreed to undertake the task. Then in a complete chapter on *dandanīti* (12.70) Bhīṣma declares that the king can cause either prosperity or disaster for his people and can even turn the Kali Yuga into the Satya Yuga (cf. also 5.130.14–16). Although all of these narratives stress the divine origin of kingship, there is also a recognition of what may be called the social contract aspect.

The king is thus central to the state in the evolved pattern visible in the didactic portions but he is envisaged as being supported by various constituents of the state, variously termed *aṅga* and *prakṛti*.

The seven elements of the state, *saptāṅga*, are both mentioned (e.g. 12.59.51) and enumerated—the king himself, *amātya*, *kośa*, *danda*, *mitra*, *janapada* and *pura* (12.69.62–63; in a different order at 12.308.153–5, which places the ally first)—but references to an eight-membered kingdom (*astāṅga rājya*, e.g. 12.122.8c and 15.9.8cd) are not elucidated and nor is a mention of eight *mantrins*, apart from their comprising four brāhmans, three *śūdras* and the *sūta*, and to the eight virtues that they are to possess (12.86.6–10). The reference in the *Śāntiparvan* to the king as one who sees his enemy's weak points (*dvītchidradarśī*, 12.57.17a), makes use of spies and stratagems, and knows the three *vargas*, which consist of stability, growth or decay (*sthānavyuddhiksayātmanah*, 12.57.18d, cf. 69.67, also 5 App. I.1.11), illustrates the view by that stage of aggrandisement at the expense of neighbouring kingdoms as a major aspect of the king's duties; on the whole in the narrative this is presented more simply as the *kṣatriya*'s duty to fight for his rights (for example, Bhīma's angry words at 3.34.16–23 about the Kauravas having stolen their kingdom). More generally, in relation to other rulers a king should employ the three methods of conciliation, bribery and subversion (12.69.23, cf. 5.80.13), elsewhere extended to five (with *danda* and *naya* added, at 5.130.30) or to other totals. Monarchy is quite obviously regarded as the norm and, although the *Śāntiparvan* treats of *ganas* and *saṃghas* in two chapters (12.82 and 108), the treatment is largely theoretical and the two terms seem to be used interchangeably; it is noteworthy that in the narrative parts many groups known from other sources as republican or oligarchic—if anything is said about their mode of government—are referred to as having a *rājan* (examples include the Madras, the Mallas at 2.27.3c and the Trigartas at 7.10.16–17), although the Utsavasamketas are termed *ganas* (2.29.8a), as are the Śūdras and Ābhīras (2.29.9a).

Even in the earlier, narrative portions, there is a natural tendency to aggrandise the institution of monarchy by referring to the king as *sārvabhauma*, *cakravartin* or *saṃrāṭ* but on the whole these titles are not used with any specific connotation, whereas the terms *adhipati*, *ādhipatya* and *adhirājya* do seem to designate kingdoms with other kingdoms subordinate to them. The main virtues required of a king are benevolence towards his subjects, maintenance of the social order and ability to judge the situation, while the basic defect is self-indulgence, which is elaborated at one point into the seven vices: women, dice, hunting, drink, harsh speech, excessive punishment and abuse of wealth

(5.33.73–74). The benevolence expected of a king is illustrated by the declaration that, during the ideal time when Bhīṣma acted as regent, the Kurus constructed wells, rest houses, *sabhās*, tanks and dwellings for brāhmaṇas (1.102.11). Bhīṣma himself declares at one point that a king who does not protect, like an unlearned brāhmaṇa or a cloud without rain, is as useless as a wooden elephant, a deer made of leather, a cart without a driver or a barren field (12.79.41–42) and at another that a king who does not protect his subjects may be mercilessly killed by them like a mad dog (13.60.19–20). The legend of the evil king Vena who was killed by sages shows that this was considered a theoretical possibility (cf. 12.59.98–100).

The position of *yuvarāja* is mentioned on several occasions—for example, Duḥṣanta installed his son by Śakuntalā, Bharata, as *yuvarāja* (1.69.44), Bharata consecrated his adopted son Bhūmanyu (1.89.19), Śaṃtanu anointed Devavrata to the office (1.94.38) and Yudhiṣṭhīra installed Bhīma in the *yauvarājya* (12.41.8)—but no details are given, although it appears from the narrative that regularly the *yuvarāja* thereafter took an active part in the affairs of the kingdom. Several incidents in the narrative indicate that primogeniture was regarded as normal, including for example the opposition by the people to Yayāti's nomination of his youngest son Pūru as his successor (1.80.12–15) and the way that Bhīṣma's conduct is regarded as so exceptional, while it is declared on occasion that the Kuru tradition is for the oldest son to follow his father (e.g. 1.107.24–27). However, physical handicap was a bar to kingship, as not only the cases of Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Pāṇḍu show but also that of Pratīpa's oldest son, Devāpi (5.147.16–26), while depravity was also a reason for being passed over (for example, Sagara expelling Asamañjas from the kingdom, 3.106.10–16). The only extensive description of an installation is very late, since it is Yudhiṣṭhīra's at 12.40, and this is clearly heavily indebted to the ritual texts.

The main court officials are the *mantrin*, *saciva* and *amātya* but the terms are not differentiated in meaning, as Brajdeo Prasad Roy has shown,⁸ although by contrast the *Kautīṭya Arthaśāstra* apparently makes *amātya* a more inclusive, and therefore inferior, term to *mantrin* (e.g. KA 1.8.29 and 1.10.1). Their role is primarily advisory and the *Śāntiparvan* indicates this by the use of terms like counsellorship (*matisācivya*, 12.112.39c) and the king's advisers (*nṛpater matidāh*, 12.116.15c), but

⁸ Roy 1975: 190.

they also carried on the administration during the king's absence for any reason; considerable stress is laid in both narrative and didactic parts on the secrecy of their advice. The qualities that they should possess are given on various occasions but only in general terms of virtues like bravery, learning, loyalty and honesty (e.g. 12.57.23–25, 81.21–29 and 84.11–13) and being of high birth (e.g. 2.5.33, 12.81.21 and 15.9.14). More generally, they are seen as included among the king's servants (*bhrtya*, or more specifically *rājapurusa*, *rājabhrtya*, *rājayukta*) or household officials (*paurogava*, e.g. 3.141.4c and 15.10.13c), who include, for example, his chamberlain and accountants (5.30.26), and the supervisors of the women's quarters (*stryadhakṣa*, 15.29.20a). Indeed in the late *Prajāgaraparvan* Vidura says to Yudhiṣṭhira that one should give charge of the women's quarters to the father, the kitchen to the mother, the cattle to someone equal to oneself, should go ploughing oneself, have dealings with merchants through servants and serve brāhmaṇas through one's sons (5.38.12), although this ideal may well be more general rather than being specific to a king. Even in the *Śāntiparvan* the king's servants are divided into *pāripārśvaka*, basically his own household, and *bahiścara*, presumably employed in administering areas outside his capital (12.119.9–10).

However, a chief minister is occasionally mentioned (e.g. *pradhānāmātya* at 3.190.21, *mantrimukhya* at 2.51.20) and other more specialised officials are also referred to: the envoy, *dūta*, the minister for war and peace, *samdhivigrahaka*, and the army commander, *senāpati* (the qualifications of all three given at 12.86.25–31); of these, envoys and army commanders figure quite prominently in the narrative portions, with for example Dhṛtarāṣṭra sending on one occasion his half-brother Vidura as envoy to the Pāṇḍavas (2.52.1–3) and on another the *sūta* Saṃjaya (5.22.1), and Drupada sending his *purohita* as his envoy to the Kurus (5.5.18). Elsewhere (at 12.41.8–14) Yudhiṣṭhira appoints Bhīma to the office of *yuvarāja*, Vidura to the task of considering the *śādgunya* (the six measures of foreign policy mentioned also, for example, at 2.5.11a, 12.57.16c and 15.11.5–6 and enumerated at 12.69.65–66), Saṃjaya to considering income and expenditure (*āyavyaya*), Nakula to control of the army, payment of allowances and wages (*bhaktavetana*, also for example at 2.5.39b and 3.16.21a) and supervision of workmen, Arjuna to defence against hostile armies and suppression of the proud, Dhaumya as *purohita*, and Sahadeva as his bodyguard; this is clearly intended to constitute a complete

portfolio of ministerial duties but its theoretical nature is also apparent. A somewhat more realistic list of duties is indicated by the statement that a king should appoint *amātyas* or other competent officials for mines, salt, tolls, river-crossings and elephant forests (*ākare lavaṇe śulke tare nāgavane tathā | nyased amātyān nṛpatiḥ svāptān vā puruṣān hitān*, 12.69.28). In addition, the late *kaccit adhyāya* refers to the eighteen *tīrthas* of the other side and the fifteen of the king's own side, meaning evidently by the term the group of high officials (2.5.27; eighteen *tīrthas* are also mentioned in the same context of use of spies in the *Kauṭilya Arthaśāstra* at 1.12.20 and listed at 1.11.6), as well as to the officials employed in the collection of revenue and the clerks and accountants who maintained the records (*śulkopajīvin*, 103d, and *ganaka-lekhakāḥ*, 62b). The use of espionage is mentioned here and in other didactic passages (e.g. 2.5.27, 3.149.40, 5.34.32, 12.69.9–13, 138.39–42, 15.10.6–7) but is not prominent within the narrative, although occasional incidental references are found, such as Samjaya being told by a spy about deliberations on the Pāṇḍavas' side (3.48.14) and Bhīṣma's mention of his use of spies against Drupada (5.193.56).

Information on the treasury, *kośa*, comes almost exclusively from the *Śāntiparvan* (in particular from *adhyāyas* 69 and 89–90), since within the main narrative the only forms of income for the king that are given any prominence are the booty won from defeated opponents and the tribute brought by subordinate rulers, most notably in Dur-yodhana's envious description of the tribute offered to the Pāṇḍavas (2.46–47), but also for example in Arjuna's frequent epithet of *dhanam-jaya*. In the *Śāntiparvan* the strength of the treasury is declared to be fundamental to the king's power (*rājñāḥ kośabalaṁ mūlaṁ kośamūlaṁ punar balaṁ*, 12.128.35ab, cf. *kośamūlā hi rājānah*, 12.119.16), since a depleted treasury means a poor army (e.g. *rājñāḥ kośaksayād eva jāyate balasam-ksayāḥ*, 12.128.11cd, cf. 12.106.18ef) and conversely enriching the treasury is prudent policy (e.g. 12.58.8 and 15.11.8); even so, it is still envisaged in physical terms as a chest, store-room or granary (e.g. 12.116.19–20, cf. 2.5.57 and 12.119.17, also *rājakośasya goptāram* at 12.83.4a and *kośapāla* at 15.29.21c). Wages to the army and officials were paid monthly (e.g. 2.54.20) and delay in payment is noted in the *kaccit adhyāya* as a source of discontent among officials (2.5.39, cf. 3.16.21–22). Proper rates of taxation are indicated in the story of how Manu is made king by Brahmā: 2% (*adhipañcāśat*) on cattle and gold and a tenth of the crop (12.67.23, cf. for the tenth

share 12.308.158), as well as a quarter of the subject's merit (*caturtham tasya dharmasya*, 26c). More often the proper rate is stated as being a sixth of the produce in the proverbial *ādāya balisadbhāgam yo rāṣṭram nābhirkṣati | pratigrhṇāti tatpāpam caturamśena pārthivah* at 12.25.12 (cf. 12.69.24 and 137.96). The main source of income is clearly the *balisadbhāga*, the sixth part of agricultural produce, but others are customs duties and fines (e.g. 12.72.10 and 69.25), as well as state monopolies on mining, salt-manufacture and elephants (e.g. 12.69.28). The right to tax is regularly presented as conditional on the king fulfilling his duty to protect, to the extent that Bhīṣma even suggests that the king should make good from his treasury losses suffered from the theft that he has failed to prevent (12.76.10), and the possibility is envisaged that merchants and farmers will leave the country if taxed too heavily (12.90.22–23), while taxation on craftsmen should take account of their costs of production (12.88.12–14). If rates of tax have to be increased, this should be done gradually and without harming the subjects, in the way that the bee, the calf and the leech draw their nourishment or the tigress carries her cub (12.89.4–8). The exemption from taxation of brāhmaṇas (e.g. 12.72.21–23) is explicitly denied to those who have taken up illicit occupations (12.77.2–9). In a crisis a king is advised to seek loans from his subjects with a promise of repayment, contrasting this with the certainty of loss at the hands of an enemy (12.88.24–37), whereas in another passage he is permitted to adopt any method necessary, including harrassment of his subjects (12.128.20–29 and 36).

The king's duty of punishment, *danda*, or in broader terms administration of justice, is again mainly taken for granted in the narrative and only specifically discussed in the didactic portions, such as the discourse by Bhīṣma to Yudhiṣṭhīra on the nature and purpose of *danda* at 12.121–2, where its origin is attributed to Brahmā or Śiva in order to eliminate the state of anarchy. The term *danda* suggests an understanding of punishment primarily in terms of retribution, although the *Śāntiparvan* at one point refers to twofold punishment but without elaboration (12.58.10), at another declares that brāhmaṇas may not be given physical punishment but may be banished (12.56.33), at another talks of *danda* going about cutting, piercing, breaking, cutting, rending and splitting (12.121.17–18) and of mutilation, torture, death and banishment as its forms (12.122.41, cf. 12.160.69 and 259.13), while elsewhere it lists four degrees of punishment from mild reproof to capital punishment appropriate to successive ages

(12.259.19–20) in the debate between king Dyumatsena and his son Satyavān, where the latter is arguing against the death penalty.⁹ The king should be always ready to punish (*nityam udyatadañḍah*, 12.120.9, cf. 13.128.51a and 131.37) and *danda* itself is many-eyed (*naikanayana*, 12.121.14c); *danda* is identified with Viṣṇu and *danda-nīti* with Lakṣmī as well as Sarasvatī (12.121.22–23). It is the ultimate protection of the subjects and not even the king's relatives or his *purohita* are immune from punishment (12.121.57). The story of Śaṅkha and Likhita suggests that cases were heard orally by the king in person (12.24);¹⁰ certainly this is the case in the main narrative with disputes which can be seen as in some sense judicial, such as the debate over whether Draupadī was lawfully staked in the dice game (2.60–65) and Virāṭa's response when Draupadī complains about Kīcaka (4.15.27–28). It is declared that a witness who bears false testimony destroys his ancestors and his offspring for seven generations and that someone who fails to say what he knows incurs the same guilt (1.7.3–4); however, according to the *Viduragītā*, one should not call as a witness a palmist, a thief turned merchant, a bird-snarer, a physician, an enemy, an ally or an actor (5.35.37), while there is no *sabhā* (here presumably a judicial assembly) if there are no elders, who are no elders if they do not declare *dharma* (5.35.49).

The main term for an ally is *mitra*, although *suhṛt* and *sahāya* are also used in this sense. Basically, an ally will be loyal and do his best to help in difficulties (e.g. 5.91.10–11) and the advice of friends should be heeded (e.g. 5.122.20–26). Within the late *Viduragītā* a friend, *suhṛt*, is sententiously defined as not one whose anger is feared or who has to be dealt with cautiously but one who can be trusted like a father (5.36.35) but, although the context is the impending war, the gist of the passage is primarily in terms of the nature of true friendship. Later in the *Udyogaparvan* it is stated that, whereas ministers or the army may desert their king if they see him frightened, true friends will stick by him (5.134.1–9). Within the narrative of Arjuna's fight

⁹ Specific punishments are indicated for specific offences: imprisonment for bribery (4.4.42), cutting off the hand for theft (12.24.19), impalement for theft (1.57.77 and 101.2–12) or brewing liquor (16.2.18–20), being devoured by dogs for adultery on the part of the woman and being burnt to death on a heated iron bed for the man (12.159.59–61), and fines or execution for various serious offences (e.g. 15.10.2–4). Banishment was recommended for brāhmans instead of capital punishment (e.g. 12.56.31–33 and 77.12–14).

¹⁰ The views of Śaṅkha and Likhita on proper behaviour, *vyavahāra*, are mentioned here at 12.24.2–22 and also at 12.116.21, 128.29 and 130.15.

with Karna, allies are declared to be of four kinds: natural, those won by conciliation, those gained by wealth and those attracted by prowess (8.64.27). In the *Sāntiparvan*, however, the types of person who should be avoided as allies are enumerated on the basis of their qualities (12.162.6–16), while at another point a fourfold classification is given—into those with a common goal, those seeking shelter, natural allies and artificial or acquired allies—extended with a fifth type who places morality first (12.81.3–4), and elsewhere again it is emphasised that neither alliance and friendship nor enmity is permanent, being determined by self interest, and so caution is always necessary (12.136.130–137). The technical term *ākṛanda* to denote the friendly state in the rear occurs at 12.69.19.

The account of the origins of kingship at 12.59, already examined, defines the types of victory as *dharma-vijaya*, *arthavijaya* and *āsuravijaya* (38–39), while Vyāsa declares that the best form of victory is won by conciliation, the middling by causing dissension and the lowest by actual warfare (6.4.32). The narrative itself adopts a generally more positive attitude towards warfare but equally suggests restraint in the treatment of defeated rulers and their subjects. For example, after Bhīma has defeated and captured Jayadratha, he shaves his head apart from five *sikhas* and wishes to enslave him, but Yudhiṣṭhira urges his release, despite his attempted abduction of Draupadī (3.256, cf. also 4 App. 32). Again, despite the illwill that has provoked the conflict, Drona frees Drupada, the king of Pāñcāla, and returns half his kingdom (1.128). In the *Sāntiparvan* the rule is propounded that a defeated king may only be enslaved for a year before being freed and similarly with his daughter, while property may be seized with the exception of that meant for the performance of sacrifices (for doing which King Divodāsa is condemned) and King Nābhāga is held up as an ideal for having given away captured territory, apart from that owned by *śrotriyas* and *tāpulas*, as *dakṣinā* (12.97); the concept of subsequent release for someone enslaved after capture is fairly general in the narrative books (for example 2.35.7, as well as the capture of Jayadratha just mentioned). On the whole, though, in the earlier passages the pattern of simply imposing tribute on defeated rulers is followed and this is still found in the didactic parts, as when Vyāsa advises Yudhiṣṭhira to install the brothers, sons or grandsons of kings defeated in the war as the next rulers in their respective kingdoms (12.34.30–33).

The last two of the seven elements of the state are the *janapada*

and *pura*, to which however relatively little attention is paid in the narrative, although there is rather more material in the didactic portions, in particular in 12.87–90. The nature of the city as the king's place of residence is treated in 12.87, along with the six kinds of fort, *durga*, which should be provided for its safety, while the subject matter of 12.88 is the care and protection of the country. This *adhyāya* lays down that overseers, *adhipati*, should be appointed for one village and for ten, twenty, one hundred and one thousand villages, using also the specific terms *grāmika*, *daśapa*, *vīṁśatipa* and *grāmaśatādhyakṣa* or *śatapāla* for them (12.88.3–8), but does not detail their duties, apart from the *grāmika* reporting to his superior on *grāmadoṣa*, problems in the village. The *grāmika* should subsist on produce from the village (*grāmānabhojjyāmi*, 12.88.6a)—no doubt by a levy in kind—and pass a proportion on to his superiors, while the *grāmaśatādhyakṣa* is entitled to the produce of one village; the *sahasrapati* is entitled to the revenue from a suburb, *sākhānagara* in the form of grain, gold and produce but similarly remits part to the *rāṣṭriya*. The institution of the village *pañcāyat* is mentioned in the late *kaccit adhyāya*, when Nārada asks whether each group of five in Yudhiṣṭhira's *janapada* is functioning correctly (2.5.70), but no details of its operation are given; elsewhere there are occasional references to the practice of *viṣṭi*, forced labour for communal purposes from which brāhmaṇas following their proper vocation are exempt (e.g. 10.2.17b, 12.59.41c and 77.7d). After thus outlining village administration, Bhīṣma continues in 12.88 with a single official supervising all matters in each city (*nagare nagare ca syād ekah sarvārthacintakah*, 10ab), whereas an incidental reference in the narrative mentions the Pāñḍavas going to the houses of the *nagarādhikṛtas* of Vāraṇāvata (1.134.7). Elsewhere in the *Sāntiparvan* it is said that fines collected from those who violate the ten *dharma*s should go towards the protection of the citizens (12.69.25) and that, in addition to measures for the defence of the city, steps should be taken to protect the inhabitants against other dangers and to provide for their well-being; for example, houses thatched with straw should be daubed with mud and other dry grass removed in the month Caitra for fear of fire, and no fires should be lighted in daytime (12.69.45–48), the king should see to the state of the roads, water-supply, markets and store-houses (12.69.51–52) and he should arrange adequate supplies of oil, honey, ghee, corn and herbs or medicines (12.69.54).

V. I. Kalyanov has looked at the *kṣatriya* code of honour in the *Mahābhārata* through some of the major episodes in the story.¹¹ He points first to examples of ‘high martial honour’ in the duel between Rāma Jāmadagnya and Bhīṣma, where Rāma at the end congratulates Bhīṣma for his success (5.179–186), in the duel between Jarāsamdha and Bhīma, where Jarāsamdha chose the strongest of those challenging him (2.21), in Bhīṣma’s refusal to use weapons against the once female Śikhandin (5.169), in Arjuna’s oath to kill Jayadratha for the death of Abhimanyu (7.51), and in Karṇa’s reactions to the disabling of Bhīṣma and to Kunti’s request (5.3 and 5.144). He next gives examples of the violation of this code for reasons of expediency in Arjuna’s intervention in the duel between Bhūriśravas and Sātyaki (7.117–118), the duplicity over Aśvatthāman in order to secure Drona’s death at Kṛṣṇa’s suggestion (7.164–165), Arjuna’s killing of Karṇa when he had got down from his chariot and was unarmed (8.66–67), and the general deviousness of Kṛṣṇa’s advice, which Dur-yodhana castigates (9.60). Further instances of breaches of generally accepted codes of warfare that could be added include the concerted attack on Abhimanyu (7.48) and then his being killed when he no longer has a weapon (7.118.26), Bhīma striking Duryodhana on the thigh with his club (9.59.5–6, cf. 62.8–9), and the night-attack by Aśvatthāman and his two companions on the Pāṇḍava camp in the *Sauptikaparvan*. Elsewhere Kalyanov examines further diplomatic theory in relation to Kṛṣṇa’s actions on the basis of the *Bhagavadyānaparvan* in the *Udyogaparvan* (5.70–137).¹² He emphasises that Kṛṣṇa’s mission to the Kaurava court is aimed at achieving Yudhiṣṭhira’s goal of preserving peace at any price, comparing his role as an ambassador and the methods he uses in rather general terms with the prescriptions of the *arthaśāstra* and *dharmaśāstra* literature. The most specific feature that he draws attention to is the concept of the four means (*upāya*) of peaceful negotiations, bribery, causing dissension and use of force, which he regards as underlying this episode and which Kṛṣṇa explicitly refers to after it is over in discussion with Yudhiṣṭhira (5.147.7–17); these appear also briefly in the *Rāmāyaṇa* (5.39.2–4), as well as in the *Kauṭilya Arthaśāstra* 2.10 and *Manusmṛti* 7.109, for example.

At the beginning of the *Bhīṣmaparvan*, as the two armies assemble on Kurukṣetra, the leaders establish the rules of warfare, prohib-

¹¹ Kalyanov 1984.

¹² Kalyanov 1979.

iting the killing of a soldier who shouts his surrender, of one who has no weapons or of one who is fleeing, and affirming that warriors of the different types should fight only those of the same type (6.1.26–33); this is placed in a context directly relevant to the narrative, unlike such codes of conduct formulated in the didactic parts (such as 12.96–97 or more briefly 12.133.13–15). Incidental references are made from time to time to various codes of chivalry, for example, a proper warrior should not strike a fallen foe (e.g. 3.19.13), nor attack a non-combatant or one who has no weapon (7.118.7–8, 131.3, 8.49.22 and 66.63), nor strike below the navel (9.59.6, cf. 60.27–38), nor kill women, cows, brāhmans, someone whose food you have eaten or who is seeking refuge (2.38.13).¹³ Scruples about killing women are most strikingly illustrated in the narrative by Bhīṣma's refusal to fight Śikhaṇḍin. However, battles were often fought with little regard for such rules; for example, in the clash between the Trigartas and the Matsyas the fighting is resumed by the light of the moon (4.31.1–3) and elsewhere there are references to lamps to light the battlefield at night (7.138. 11–15 and 24–26, 139.3, 144.36). In addition, the right to self-defence—to kill someone attacking, *ātatāyin*—is recognised (e.g. 6.103.95 and 9.10.11).

The main warriors (*mahāratha, rathin*) used two-wheeled chariots driven by a charioteer (*sārathi, sūta*), while the warrior stood on the chariot and hurled missiles at his opponents. The usual aim was the disabling of the horses or charioteer, so as to immobilise the warrior and make it easier to kill him. Bows and arrows were the main weapons at this stage, while at close quarters warriors fought with swords, maces, axes and other hand weapons; spears or javelins and discuses were also used. The role of the *kṣatriya* is to be brave, to give (in contrast to the brāhmaṇa receiving) and to exercise power; usually this is implicit but, for example, Kuntī sends a message to Yudhiṣṭhīra which declares this explicitly both in her own words and through the tale of Vidurā and her son (5.130–135).¹⁴ An interesting

¹³ These conventions, referred to incidentally in the narrative, are collected into a comprehensive list in the didactic parts; for example, Kāpavya is represented as laying down, before he will accept leadership of the Dasyus, that they must not strike a fearful woman, a child or an ascetic, nor kill a non-combatant, nor take women by force, since women are never to be killed by anyone fighting and the well-being of cows and brāhmans is always to be fought for, and that they are not to destroy crops nor cause hindrance to ploughing (12.133.13–15).

¹⁴ The fullest treatment of the material in this and the next few paragraphs is still

light is thrown on the warrior's code by the oath taken by the king of the Trigartas along with a sizable group of other warriors fighting for the Kauravas to obstruct and kill Arjuna or perish in the attempt, becoming a kind of suicide squad (7.16); the actual oath is preceded by elaborate rituals and the group—subsequently regularly called the *samsaptakas* (e.g. 7.16.39c, 19.2bd, 32.15b, 50.2c, 51.1b, 8.32.1c, 37.33a, 42.56c, 49.96c, 9.1.26a)—adopt a mix of ascetic and martial dress. The desire to bring together their subsequent encounters with Arjuna seems to have led to a re-ordering of material by the Southern recension in the *Karnaparvan*, delaying some events from the first to the second day of Karṇa's generalship.¹⁵

The standard description of an army in the narrative is that it contains the four divisions of foot-soldiers, cavalry, elephants and chariots (e.g. 3.17.2–5, 4.30.8cd, 63.12–13, 5.19.1), so much so that *caturanga bala* is a standard phrase. The foot-soldiers were usually archers but their role is given little prominence, to such an extent that terms for ordinary soldiers are infrequent (*padāti* is the commonest, but *yodha* and *sainika* also occur). Cavalry (*sādin*, also *hayāroha*, *asvāroha*, *vājin*) was rather more significant but even so the main interest shown by the epic's authors is in the breeds of horse employed (for example, at 6.86.3–4 Kāmboja and other breeds are listed), while occasional mention is made of their grooms and attendants (*asvādhyakṣa*), stables (*asvāgāra*, *asvāśalā*) and even armour (e.g. 6.86.5b). Mounted archers are mentioned at 1.124.24–28, alongside the more usual chariot-mounted warriors. War-elephants too are said to wear spiked harnesses and armour (5.149.82ab, cf. 7.28.8) but usually little detail is given otherwise and the great warriors do not ride elephants;¹⁶ in a rather theoretical description of Duryodhana's massed armies, the elephants are said to carry seven men, two holding goads, two archers, two swordsmen and one holding a spear and banner (5.152.13–14). However, the main interest is clearly in the chariots and especially the warriors mounted on them; indeed, S. D. Singh suggests that the

that by Hopkins (1889a), although there is some additional information in Sarva Daman Singh (1965). The data presented come from my own sampling of the text but are indebted to these two earlier treatments.

¹⁵ For comments on this transposition see the Critical Notes on 8.12. Hopkins provides a description of their vow with some comment (1889a: 232).

¹⁶ The rare exceptions seem late; they include Duryodhana mounted on an elephant just before the battle commences (6.20.7), the Yavana Bhagadatta fighting from one (6.91.31–81), and Duryodhana mounted on one of the army of elephants being attacked by Arjuna (7.25.10–13).

Mahābhārata shows an older pattern than the early Buddhist texts, since the chariot is still supreme and is essentially the same vehicle as that of the Vedic period.¹⁷

In the main narrative the simple term *ratha* is regularly used to denote the war-chariot but in the *Anuśāsanaparvan* the more specific *sāṃgrāmika ratha* is found (13.53.29) and *syandana* is occasionally found (e.g. 3.58.18b). The horses harnessed to them could also be armoured (e.g. 3.18.1c and 7.162.44c) and it seems that usually two were used, although occasionally four are mentioned, for example at 5.152.10–11 in that same description of Duryodhana’s massed armies just mentioned, where in addition the charioteer has apparently three assistants and there are two warriors; four horses are also mentioned (for example at 1.96.37, 213.41, 4.52.8 and 21, 5.81.19, 7.47.9, 88.22, 131.47, 135.46, 148.4 and 9.24.20) and even eight horses (at 2.54.6 and probably at 7.150.12), while a pair of side charioteers, *pārṣṇisārathī*, are mentioned at for example 9.15.63d and 30.36b. Occasionally eight-wheeled chariots are mentioned (for example at 7.142.34c, where this Rākṣasa’s chariot is also made of iron, and 150.12c). However, the usual pattern was undoubtedly a single charioteer and a single warrior, as is clear from the descriptions of all the major duels in the narrative, as well as the frequency of the term *dvairatha* for a chariot duel, especially in the *Karṇaparvan*.¹⁸ The considerable prestige and standing of the charioteer in the earlier epic is also shown by the fact that not only Kṛṣṇa but also Nala and Śalya acted as charioteers at some point; indeed, Śalya describes the duties of a charioteer to Karṇa as he prepares to act as his driver (8.28.5–8) and these include keeping count of the weapons, as subsequently Viśoka does for Bhīṣma (8.54.14–16). As several episodes also show, the wheels of the chariot were a vulnerable point; for example, Yudhāmanyu and Uttamaujas act as *cakrarakṣa* protecting Arjuna and do not leave him (8.7.30). Various parts of the chariot are mentioned, though rarely outside the quite frequent lists of its parts (e.g. 7.35.31–32, 37.5–6, 40.18, 43.16–17, 65.28, 88.9–10 and

¹⁷ Singh 1965: 36 (more generally, 35–45).

¹⁸ The term *dvairatha* occurs in the first 9 *parvans* at 1.1.144a, 2.171c, 3.77.8c, 4.32.30c, 44.6d, 45.9a, 54.20c, 5.8.26d, 22.28b, 56.21b, 139.16a, 18b, 149.32a, 6.56.28d, 79.1b, 7.73.22c, 106.21c, 131.102c, 148.55b, 150.89c, 157.4d, 11d, 158.55a, 8.4.54b, 5.23b, 72c, 87b, 42.52c, 55.69d, 57.9d, 63.9a, 61b, 70b, 68.44d, 9.20.26b, also for example at 1.151* 3, 2 App. 28.118, 4.582* 2, 583* 2, 910* 38, App. 51.14, 6 App. 4.293, 8.48* 2, 993* 2, App. 25.20 and App. 37.16.

97.21–22). Apart from the wheel itself (*cakra*), the rim (*nemi*), hub (*nābhi*), spokes (*ara*), axle (*akṣa*) and axle-tree (*janighā*) are referred to occasionally, and there is also mention of the driving-box (*kośa, rathopastha*,¹⁹ the shaft and the drag or stay (*kūbara* at 6.44.5b etc. and *anukarsa* at 2.49.6b and 5.152.3a), the equipment, the warrior's stance and the double pole (*apaskara, adhiṣṭhāna* and *īśādanda*, 7.40.18ab), the triple-pole (*trivenu*, 3.231.5c etc.), the reins (*raśmi*, 8.19.24 etc.), the charioteer's stance (*rathanīda* or *nīda*, 6.49.6b etc.), the seat (*bandhura*, 3.230.30b, 7.40.18b, 12.228.9a), and the guard-rail (*varūtha*, 3.230.30a etc.).

In addition to the usual four-membered army of the main narrative, a six-membered army is mentioned once in the narrative (5.94.16) and once in a didactic passage which adds *yantra*, siege-engines, to the standard four, leaving the sixth unidentified (12.104.37), while an eight-fold division of the visible *danda* is given at 12.59.40–41 (chariots, elephants, horses, foot-soldiers, labourers, boats, spies and guides), which also refers to the invisible *danda* or *bala* comprising poisons and the like. Elsewhere in the didactic parts (15.12.7–8), the forces are classified according to the nature of their recruitment into the king's own (*maula*, also for example at 5.165.18c), an ally's, forest tribes, hired and those of a guild (*śrenibala*), with varying degrees of loyalty. More elaborate and clearly theoretical is the classification of soldiers' abilities according to their place of origin and their physical characteristics found at 12.102, which also lists their favoured weapons and methods of fighting; one narrative passage, however, quite incidentally refers to *sūdra*, *vaiśya* and *kṣatriya* heroes gaining heaven (8.32.18), whereas in the *Śāntiparvan* it is only reluctantly conceded that in times of distress a *vaiśya* may take up the bow in self-defence (12.159.31). It is quite clear from the narrative, though, that the chariot warriors at least were normally *kṣatriyas*. Exceptional military prowess was to be recognised by a doubling of wages (12.101.27) or by marks of honour (*vandanair mangalena ca*, 12.101.35d), while provision was to be made for the maintenance of the widows of soldiers killed in battle (2.5.44 and 12.87.24).

The different units of an army are carefully detailed at 1.2.13–23, where the *sūta* Ugraśravas explains them to the sages in the Naimiṣā forest—a suitably uninformed audience; the smallest unit is the *patti*, made up of five foot-soldiers, 3 horses, one chariot and one elephant,

¹⁹ Hopkins suggests (1889a: 238): 'The *upastha* was the general bottom of the car; the *nīda* was the little shelf in front where the charioteer stood. This difference existed probably in four-horse chariots only.'

and three of these constitute a *senāmukha*, and similarly three of each unit make up the next larger unit in the sequence, which continues with *gulma*, *gana*, *vāhinī*, *prtanā*, *camū*, *anīkinī* and *akṣauhiṇī*.²⁰ There were eighteen such armies, *akṣauhiṇī*, taking part in the war, eleven on the Kaurava side and seven on the side of the Pāṇḍavas. Extraordinary as the figures implied by this scheme are, they are surpassed by some of the totals for those entering the last day of fighting (9.7.36–40). An equally artificial and in part contradictory scheme is found in the description of Duryodhana's massed armies, where first the proportions are given as one chariot to ten elephants, one elephant to ten horses and one horse to ten foot-soldiers (5.152.19) and then the different units are the *senā* with 500 elephants and as many chariots, the *prtanā* formed from ten *senās* and the *vāhinī* made up of ten *prtanās*, but—the text continues—*vāhinī*, *prtanā*, *senā*, *dhvajinī*, *sādinī*, *camū*, *akṣauhiṇī* and *varūthinī* are used interchangeably (5.152.21–22); next, the Pāṇḍavas' army is made up from the *patti*, comprising 250 men, of which three constitute a *senāmukha* or *gulma* and ten *gulmas* form a *gana* (5.152.24–25). Some of these do appear as names of units in actual battle contexts (e.g. *gulma* at 7.16.1a, 9.28.62a, etc.) but without details of their precise size. Elsewhere, commanders of ten, a hundred and a thousand are prescribed (12.101.28, cf. KA 10.6.45). The regular term for the army commander is *senāpati* throughout but a not infrequent alternative term is *senāpranetr* (e.g. 5.152.2a and 7.5.5a, 7c, 11a), and Duryodhana, as he prepares to choose the first general of his army, emphasises the need for one to co-ordinate the army's activities—but only one (5.153.2–3).

Different types of weapons are listed quite frequently (for example at 3.16.5–8, 5.19.3–4, 6.44.13–14, 72.4–6, 114.2–3, 7.29.16–18, 35.23–25, 153.21–23, 162.40–41 and 8.16.9–10) but such lists include weapons rarely mentioned elsewhere, indicating their late and artificial nature. Besides the various divine weapons which Arjuna is credited with being able to use (e.g. *āgneya*, *vāruna*, *saumya*, *vāyavya*, *vaiśnava*,

²⁰ Of these terms *akṣauhiṇī* is quite common in the *Mahābhārata* by contrast with the *Rāmāyaṇa*; it occurs for example at 1.1.116c, 2.10d, 13a, 14a, 18d, 19a, 23a, 24c, 138c, 163c, 234d, 89.33e, 2.16.12a, 4.67.16c, 17a, 5.19.6a, 8c, 13c, 16d, 17c, 21d, 25d, 20.16a, 54.62a, 55.1a, 56.7c, 9c, 60.15a, 78.9c, 148.5a, 149.3c, 45c, 152.22c, 23acd, 27a, 155.17c, 6.16.35c, 18.18a, 19.1a, 25a, 65.10a, 91.5b, 7.5.28a, 7.31a, 10.12d, 19.9c, 52.19a, 56.4a, 20a, 57.12b, 87.44a, 125.12c, 131.29d, 98a, 114c, 8.4.12a, 43.75a, 51.14c, 9.1.35c, 23.30a, 28.14a, 11.1.6c, 17.16a, 12.151.32a, 14.59.14a, 19c, 22c, 23c and 15.16.13a. However, the term has been explained as a hypersanskritism from a Prākrit form and thus linguistically not very early (cf. Tedesco 1960).

aindra, pāśupata, brāhma, pārameṣṭhya and those of Prajāpati, Dhāṭr, Tvaṣṭṛ and Savitṛ, 6.116.38), a wide range of ordinary weapons were actually employed. The most common general term for a weapon, *āyudha*, usually in fact denotes a bow, whereas the less common term *praharana* tends to be used collectively for several types.

Bows and arrows are the most frequently mentioned, with a large number of terms for different types of arrows, most commonly *iṣu*, *bāṇa*, *bhalla*, *śara* and *sāyaka*, but also *añjalika*, *anaka* (8.14.15a), *ardhacandra*, *ardhanārāca*, *kankapatra*, *ksura*, *ksurapra*, *gārdhrapatra*, *nārāca*, *nālīka*, *prsatka* (8.66.25b), *pradara* (8.54.15d), *mārgaṇa*, *vatsadanta*, *vipātha* (4.38.26a and 7.37.22b), *varāhakarṇa* (4.38.27c), *vaitastika* and *śilimukha*. Many of the terms for arrows in fact denote different types of arrow-head (*salya*)—broad (*bhalla*), crescent-shaped (*ardhacandra*), calf-toothed (*vatsadanta*), frog-mouthed (*śilimukha*, perhaps better ‘whetted on the stone’), boar-eared (*varāhakarṇa*) and razor-edged (*ksura*, *ksurapra*)—and some denote their shorter length—*vaitastika* (from *vitasti*, a measure equivalent to 12 *angulas*, around 24 cm, found for example at 7.98.50c, 51a, 164.150a) and probably also *ardhacandra* and *ardhanārāca*—which may have been for use with a short, compound bow; certainly the occasional specification of the arrow as being as long as a chariot axle suggests that they were a good length (e.g. *rathāksamātrair iṣubhiḥ*, 7.131.64a, 141.17a, 150.17a and 65a). The terms *kankapatra* (e.g. 6.97.39d) and *gārdhrapatra* (e.g. 7.95.34b) signify the feathering with heron or vulture feathers, while less often peacock feathers are used (e.g. 9.27.4b), and the *punkha*, a metal end containing the notch for the bow-string, is commonly mentioned and often said to be of gold (perhaps rather gilded); arrows are occasionally said to be smeared with oil (*tailadhauta*, e.g. 8.18.9b), presumably to reduce friction, but envenomed (*lipta*), barbed (*karṇin*, literally ‘eared’) and some other types of arrow are banned (e.g. 7.164.11 and 12.96.11), although barbed arrows at least are used (e.g. 5.34.76a, 8.18.3d and 59.11a). The usual materials from which arrows were made were reeds (as the common terms *bāṇa* and *śara* demonstrate) and bamboos (as is shown by the reference to joints in such formulæ as *śaraiḥ samnataparvabhiḥ*, as well as the infrequent use of *vainava*), but there are occasional references to iron arrows (e.g. 4.38.29c, 6.50.68, 7.28.4, 8.66.58) and the *nārāca*, which is often used against elephants, is commonly thought to denote an iron arrow.²¹

²¹ See Hopkins 1889a: 279, and Singh 1965: 104–105.

Bows are most often designated by the term *dhanus*, which is substantially more frequent than *cāpa* and *kārmuka*, while other terms are *śarāvāpa*, *śarāsana*, *śārīga* and rarely *dhanwan*. The usual bow was of the longbow type, drawn back to the ear, as is mentioned from time to time, and made of the wood of the *kṛmuka* tree (hence *kārmuka*), although there is also mention of Kṛṣṇa's bow being made of horn (*sārīga*, 2.42.34f, 3.23.2d, 5.73.2d, 129.9d, 135.30d, 155.4c, 6a, 9d, 7.9.71b, 13.135.120b and 16.4.44d), which probably indicates a compound bow.²² Quivers are denoted by several terms, none of which is very frequent: *upāsaṅga* and *nīsaṅga* (both at 5.152.3—the precise meaning is uncertain), *iṣudhī*, *kalāpa*, *tūṇa*, *tūṇī*, *tūṇīra* and *śarāvara* (which, however, means a shield at 7.13.50f); from the frequency of the dual, it appears that quivers were usually strapped in pairs on the back. It is not clear whether the terms *śarāvāpa* (e.g. 1.180.12a, 7.28.6b, 105.31d and 163.18d) and *śarāsana* (e.g. 5.152.4b and 7.163.18c) denote a bow or a quiver. The bow-string, *jyā*, is also mentioned from time to time; it was made of *mūrvā* grass (*maurū*, e.g. 3.24.3c, 4.54.8d, 7.90.23a, 8.16.21c) and had a loop at each end to facilitate stringing, since the bow was usually unstrung when not in use, while the twanging of the string is one of the frequently mentioned sounds of the battlefield. From the large numbers of arrows regularly discharged, as well as the formulaic 'showers of arrows' (*śaravarṣa*) and the like, it is clear that being quick on the draw was even more important than accuracy of aim, which seems to have been displayed more in tournaments than on the battlefield. Arjuna's skill with the bow is marked by his frequent epithet, *savyasācin*, denoting his ability to use his left hand equally.

The next most frequent category of weapons is spears, javelins and similar weapons for hurling or thrusting, but these are substantially less commonly mentioned than bows and arrows. Several types of spear or javelin are named, most commonly *tomara* and *śakti*, but also *rṣti*, *pattiṣa*, *prāsa*, *bhinḍipāla*, *śūla* and rarely *kanapa/kuṇapa* (probably a Dravidian loan-word), *kampana*, *karpana* (1.63.18b), *kunta*, *khajākā* (8.8.41a) and *triśūla*.²³ Spears are sometimes explicitly said to be of metal but probably often were of wood; like arrows, they might be

²² Such is the view of Emeneau (1953).

²³ The word *nakhara*, usually an adjective meaning 'curved', occurring in the compounds *sakampanarśtinakhara* at 7.29.17a and *nakharaaprāsayodhinah* at 12.102.3b, presumably indicates another type of spear or javelin from its linkage with other weapons of this type.

oiled (e.g. *śaktayas tailadhautāḥ*, 6.83.28b). The common terms are found throughout but some of the less frequent ones occur mainly later; for example, a third of the occurrences of *bhindipāla* are in * passages, whereas *rṣti* occurs mainly in earlier passages.²⁴ Clubs and maces—commonly *parīga* and especially *gadā*, but also *mudgara* and *musala*, and rarely *laguda* (perhaps rather a stave, e.g. 7.29.16a)—are slightly less frequent as a category than spears and javelins; occasionally they are explicitly said to be made of iron (and presumably normally were so), furnished with knobs and sharp edges, and ornamented with gold (e.g. 5.50.8ab, less plausibly a golden *gadā* at 5.50.24b) and somewhat similarly iron balls are mentioned, though rarely (e.g. *ayoguda* at 7.29.16a, 153.23a and 5.543* 1, and *kārṣṇāyasaṁyāguḍāḥ* at 7.170.18d).²⁵ Though usually hand-held in combat on the ground rather than from a chariot, clubs were sometimes thrown, as is for example one ornamented with a hundred bells (7.153.13). Bhīma is noted for his preference for the club and the account of his club-fight with Duryodhana occupies the whole *Gadāyuddha-parvan* (9.54–64).

Swords are significantly less often mentioned in the narrative, though becoming more frequent in the didactic parts;²⁶ occasional descriptions of a warrior's arms suggest that the sword was a regular part of his equipment, simply less used than the bow, the spear or the club. The usual term is *khaḍga* but the older term *asi* is also found, *nistrīṁśa* occurs fifty times in *parvans* 1–9 (most often in the *Bhīṣma-parvan*), whereas *karavāla* (1.26.44b, 3.166.14c, 5.19.3d and 7.153.22a) is very rare. There is no clear evidence of any real distinction between them—indeed they may be used as synonyms (e.g. *nistrīṁśa* and *asi* at 8.9.27–28)—and their action is regularly one of cutting, not piercing, so they must have been of the broadsword or cutlass type rather than the rapier. The hilt, *tsaru*, may well be ornamented,

²⁴ The term *bhindipāla* occurs at 1.1417* 1(iic), 4 App. 29.11, 5.19.3a, 543* 2(ifc), 6.44.14b, 51.29c, 53.13b(iic), 72.5c, 87.15a, 92.51d, 57a, v.l. at 102.21a, 7.24.55b, 35.24c, 64.45a, 82.34c, 562* 3, 8.16.10b, 29c, 36.3c, 59.11c, 406* 1(iic), 838* 2, 9.62.20c, 118* 4, 13 App. 15.1182(iic). Hopkins tentatively suggests, on the basis of 5.152, that 'rṣti seems a common weapon, opposed to the knightly *pattiqa'* (1889a: 289n.) but this elaborate and probably late passage would be a poor one for making any such distinction, even if it supported it.

²⁵ The *kūṭamudgara*, found ten times in the text of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, is apparently not found in the *Mahābhārata*, according to Hopkins (1889a: 291).

²⁶ In this connection Hopkins makes the point that Indra presents Arjuna with the Gāndīva bow and Śiva presents him with the Pāśupata sword (1889a: 284).

often with gold (e.g. 4.38.31–32 and 56b) or ivory (e.g. 2.47.14b), and the sheath, *kośa*, and sword-belt, *mekhalā*, are also mentioned occasionally. In the *Śāntiparvan* there is a story of how the sword, *khadga*, was created for the protection of people by the removal of lawlessness; it is described as ‘having a sheen of the same colour as a blue lotus’ (*nīlotpalasavarnābha*, 12.160.38a), possibly indicating that iron and iron swords were still regarded as late acquisitions by mankind. A term for hardened or damasked steel, *śaikya* or *saikya*, occurs for example at 4.38.34d, 5.47.97a, 50.8a, 28a and 7.95.35a, while the term *kārṣṇāyasa* to designate iron weapons of various types occurs about as frequently as the more general term for metal, *āyasa*.

Battle-axes (*paraśvadha*, less commonly *paraśu*) are little mentioned as weapons, except in lists.²⁷ The rare term *pothika* is plausibly translated by van Buitenen as ‘siege rocks’ (at 5.152.3d), presumably for use in a *yantra* or *śataghni*. The use of siege-engines or ballistas, *yantra*, is mentioned from time to time and Nārada even alludes to a treatise on *yantras*, *yantrasūtra*, in the late *kaccit adhyāya* (2.5.110d), while the extensive defences of Dvārakā include siege-engines and sappers (*sayantrakhanakā*, 3.16.5d). Another weapon, the *śataghni*, literally ‘hundred-killers’ seems sometimes to be fixed, like the *yantra*, and sometimes hand-held; however, from its name it seems likely that it was covered with multiple spikes or bosses and was either a large device to roll down from the walls or a very knobbly club.²⁸ Another infrequent and somewhat enigmatic weapon is the *bhuśundi*, regarded by Hopkins as ‘a projectile hand-weapon’ but translated by van Buitenen as ‘catapult’ or ‘flame-thrower’, and probably some kind of club.²⁹ The *piṇāka*, almost exclusively associated with Śiva, does rarely occur

²⁷ Another term for an axe listed by Hopkins (1889a: 291), *kulīśa*, seems only to occur as a variant reading at 3.83*. It is therefore even less part of the epic military vocabulary than the woodman’s axe, *kutīhāra*, which is pressed into service occasionally (e.g. 5.9.34d and 152.7c), as is the spade, *kuddāla* (5.152.7a) and even, in still later passages, such other agricultural tools as ploughs and winnowing-baskets (*sīra*, *śūrpapitaka*, at 5.543*, a Northern addition to 5.152).

²⁸ Both the *yantra* and the *śataghni* are discussed by Hopkins (1889a: 177 and 299–302, also 1889b, and by Singh (1965: 112–14).

²⁹ Hopkins 1889a: 292; *Mahābhārata* 1973–78: I, 366 and III, 255. In the form *bhuśundi* it is found at 1.186.8a, 218.24b, 3.16.8a(imc), 21.32c, 166.15a, 167.3c, 274.22, 6.114.3d, 7.131.34b, 150.36, 151.19, 154.37, App. 17.8, 8.16.9c, 21.5, 36.3d, 107*1, 9.44.105, 10.7.27c(ic) and 13 App. 15.1181(iic), while a variant, *musandhi*, is found at 7 App. 9.14 and 12 App. 30.16. The etymology proposed by T. Burrow (1976) from **musam-dhi*- ‘having (or delivering) a punch’ suggests some kind of club; cf. also Passi 1994–95: 302.

as a weapon but only in lists, so it is unclear whether it is some kind of club or spear (e.g. 7.153.22a). A rarely mentioned weapon is the sling (*kṣepaṇī*, e.g. 6.72.6c and 114.2d), while some groups fight with stones or other natural weapons, for example the Pārvatiyas are said to use rocks and stones and other things that can be thrown (*pāśāṇa*, *āśma*, *kṣepaṇīya*, 7.97.29–33).

Defensive armour is much less frequently mentioned than the various weapons but general terms for armour are fairly common (*kavaca*, *varman*, also rarely *tanutra*, e.g. 9.23.55a, 27.12c and 12.101.6d, or *tanutrāṇa*, e.g. 7.16.23a, 102.54c and 8.19.27b), as is the usual term for a shield (*carman*, so called from the hide from which it was usually made), whereas the other term, *phalaka*, is rare (5.35.11a, 152.6a, 9.44.88b, 10.8.55d, 12.101.8c and 754* 1); although the usual material used was probably leather, iron armour is occasionally mentioned (e.g. *śaikyāyasāni varmāṇi*, 7.95.35a, even gold and iron, *suvarṇakārṣṇāya-savarmanaddha*, 4.49.15e). Less commonly, there is mention of the finger-guard (*angulitra*, e.g. 6.102.22a and 8.14.40a, *angulitrāṇa*, e.g. 4.5.1c), hand-guard (*hastāvāpa*, e.g. 4.50.17c and 7.140.28b), arm-guard (*godhā*, e.g. 4.5.1c and 7.35.23, *talatra*, e.g. 6.102.22a), neck-guard (*kanṭhatrāṇa*, e.g. 7.102.56c) and helmet (*śirastrāṇa*, e.g. 7.163.2d, 8.16.25b, 14.85.11a, and *niryūha*, e.g. 5.19.4a and 7.64.45c). Although chariot parts are mentioned occasionally, as noted above, the various equipment relating to war elephants is rarely mentioned but, for example, there are occasional references to armour for them (e.g. 5.149.82), Bhīma kills elephants described as having blankets, girths and neck-chains (*paristoma*, *kakṣyā*, *grāiveya*) as well as prods, goads and bells (*totra*, *ankuśa*, *ghanṭā*, 6.50.48–50), and a scene of carnage includes elephants with their drivers, banners (*vaijayantī*), goads (*ankuśa*), flags, quivers, armour, girths, neck-chains, blankets, bells, musth and tusks (7.35.34–35a). Elsewhere, the goad seems to be used as a weapon (e.g. 8.16.10b).

Soldiers were expected to be proficient in various gymnastic exercises (*vyāyāma*, 6.72.7–8). Stores for equipment, weapons and grain, stables for horses and elephants, and an office for the army are part of the proper provisions for a city (12.69.52). Various musical instruments were used in mustering the armies, mainly the conch, trumpet and several types of drum (*śankha*; *gomukha*; *govīṣānaka*; *bherī*, *mṛdanga*, *panava*, *muraja*, *ānaka*, *dundubhi*, *krkara*/*krkaca*/*krakaca*, *jharjhara*, *peśi*, *āḍambara*, *dīṇḍima* and the general term *vāditra*, e.g. 6.41.2–3, 42.4, 7.38.30, 8.7.35, 9.45.50–51, 10.1.59–60 and 12.101.47). Banners or pennants (*ketu*, *pātākā*) were used to distinguish the chariots of the various

warriors, and armies had large numbers of standards or flags (*dhvaja*) of various shapes and colours (e.g. *padāti dhvaja samkulam* at 3.17.5d, *dhvajān bahuvidhākārān* at 7.80.1a, 2a); so, for example, Arjuna identifies the Kauravas for Uttara by their flags (4.50.4–22) and Samjaya describes the flags of the various heroes at some length to Dhṛtarāṣṭra (7.80.2–29, cf. 6.17.18–39 and 45.7–33), while one of the frequent tactics was to sever the banner with arrows. Even the gods have their own banners: Indra's banner, Vaijayanta, is dark blue (3.43.8) and Skanda's is red with a cock on it (3.218.32). Whereas the white parasol, *chatra*, is frequently included in descriptions of the spoils of war, it is rarely mentioned in connection with the fighting, although it is included, for example, in the description of Bhīṣma's chariot (4.50.18); Hopkins therefore suggests that 'it does not really come into the poem until a later age'.³⁰ This is certainly true of the synonym *ātapatra*, which occurs mainly in the formula *pāñdureṇātapatraṇā dhriyamānena mūrdhani* (found at 1.118.10a, 3.42.14ab, 44.17a, 4.59.3ab, 5.179.13cd, 6.1.14ab, 13.14.91ab, 14.63.3ab, 74.7ab and 15.30.8ab, also 2 App. 36.17; *ātapatra* otherwise only at 3.264.66a, 4.51.15c, 6.20.8a and 7.13.30a in *parvans* 1–9).

According to Bhīṣma, the best deployment of the parts of the army on the march is to have the chariot warriors in the middle of the elephants, the horsemen behind the chariots, and the infantry protected inside the horsemen (12.100.9), amplified by the recommendation that the army of men should precede, with the carts behind and the women in the middle (12.101.40). The best time for campaigning is in Caitra or Mārgaśīrṣa, since the harvest is ready, there is plenty of water and it is neither too cold nor too hot (12.101.9–10), but foot-soldiers and elephants are more effective than cavalry and chariots in the rainy season (2.101.21–22); an auspicious time for the expedition should be chosen (12.101.16–17); and spies are to guide the army (12.101.11–12).³¹ Descriptions of camps within the narrative suggest various factors to be avoided or preferred, such as avoidance of proximity to a cremation-ground or a temple, and preference for

³⁰ Hopkins 1889a: 246. The term *chatra* occurs 80 times in *parvans* 1–9. Incidentally, Bhīṣma is distinctive for his white equipment generally—turban, horses and armour, as well as parasol (e.g. 6.16.40 and 20.9).

³¹ In the *Bhagavadīyanaparvan* Kṛṣṇa is ready for his mission in the month of Kaumuda, when autumn has ended and winter begun (5.81.6–7, cf. also 5.140.16–18), which suggests from the way it is described that this was a suitable time for the start of campaigning.

a level site and access to supplies both of food and water, as well as provision of a moat round it, if it is to be at all permanent (e.g. 3.17.1–7, 5.149.67–82, 150.14–15 and 153.33–35). The value of forts is illustrated in the narrative by the episode of the Paurava king Samvaraṇa who, when defeated and expelled from his kingdom by the Pañcālas, took shelter in a fort close to the Indus but also to mountains and from there regained his kingdom (1.89.31–41). The account of Śālva's expedition against Dvārakā suggests the sort of defensive measures regularly taken: fortification of the city itself and provision of weapons and supplies, and then dismantling of bridges, digging of trenches, destruction of wells and the like in a cordon round the city (3.16). Also in one of the narrative books, but from the late *kaccit adhyāya*, comes advice to Yudhiṣṭhira to ensure that his forts are filled with treasure, grain, arms, water, tools, craftsmen and archers (2.5.25). Even more detail is given in the *Sāntiparvan*; for example, six types of forts are listed at 12.87.5 (cf. Manu 7.70), while elsewhere their defences in terms of moats, gateways, towers, loopholes for archers and large ballistas (*sātaghni*) are enumerated, along with the appropriate stores, barracks, weapons and the like, and counter-measures against fire damage and espionage (12.69.41–58).

Various types of battle formation, *vyūha* or commonly *mahāvyūha*, are mentioned both in the narrative and occasionally in the didactic parts.³² Thus Yudhiṣṭhira suggests that the Pāṇḍava forces adopt the *sūcīmukha* formation because their forces are smaller than the opposing armies, as recommended by Brhaspati (6.19.4–5), but Arjuna prefers the *vajra vyūha*, invented by Indra (6.19.7cd, 34a, adopted by Yudhiṣṭhira himself at 6.77.21). Subsequently Arjuna adopts the *krauñcā-rūṇa vyūha* which Brhaspati recommended to Indra in the war of the Devas and Asuras (6.46.39–40, called simply *krauñca* at 47.1a).³³ Bhīṣma then draws up his forces in the *gāruḍa vyūha* and Arjuna counters with the *ardhacandra* or crescent formation (6.52.1–18, also 8.7.27c, cf. the *candrārdha* adopted by the Samśaptakas at 7.17.1); the *gāruḍa*

³² Hopkins examines the *vyūhas* briefly and also provides a description of the strategies adopted on each day of the war (1889a: 193–5, 201–202 and 204–219).

³³ Brhaspati and Uśanas (cf. later in this paragraph) are the authorities cited on military matters, just as Manu is on social conduct, and quite probably there were once extant treatises on warfare attributed to them (as is implied at 3.149.29). Their names are linked elsewhere too (e.g. 4.53.4ab and 8.26.49c, also 9.367* 3), while Brhaspati's name is linked with the *vyūharāja* adopted by Duḥśāsana at one point (8.31.25–26).

vyūha is no doubt the same as the *suparna vyūha* (7.19.4). Bhīṣma adopts the *śyena* formation (6.65.7) and then the *mandala* formation (6.77.11–12). In answer to the huge array (*mahāvyūha*) of the Kaurava forces, Pāṛṣata arrays the Pāṇḍava forces in the *śrīgātaka* formation (6.83.17). To the *śakaṭa vyūha* taken up by Droṇa is opposed the *krauñca vyūha* (7.6.15); the *śakaṭa* formation is also mentioned in a didactic passage along with the *padma* and the *vajra* as taught by Uśanas (15.12.15), while the *krauñca* formation is opposed to the *makara* formation which Yudhiṣṭhira tells Dhṛṣṭadyumna to draw up (6.71.4–21) and the *makara vyūha* itself is also mentioned elsewhere (6.65.4a, 8.7.14–21). Two unnamed formations are adopted on the seventeenth day: one to split the enemy army (*parāñikabhid*, 8.31.1a) by Arjuna and one taught by Bṛhaspati (*bṛhaspatya*, 8.31.26a) by Karṇa, while one that is good in all directions (*sarvatobhadra*, 6.95.26d and 9.7.19d) is adopted on two occasions. However, the most famous of these formations is undoubtedly the *cakra vyūha* in which Droṇa arrays the Kaurava armies on the thirteenth day and into which Abhimanyu is inveigled to his death (7.32–51).

Economic aspects

If the arguments for the structure of the *Mahābhārata* being based on the potlatch, developed by G. J. Held on the basis of the ideas of Marcel Mauss, have any validity, then the economic system of the early epic is that of gift-exchange typical of tribal chiefships.³⁴ The centrality of the dice game, *dyūta*, to the whole story does lend some support to Held's views that the *dyūta* was the traditional means to ensure the constant circulation of tribal wealth.³⁵ More recently, van Buitenen has rejected Held's argument that the dicing in the *Sabhā* is to be seen as a potlatch and emphasises instead the point that it is ritually inspired, since that makes it easier to understand the inevitability of the game; in his view, it is no coincidence that the royal consecration (*rājasūya*) and anointing (*abhiṣeka*) in the *Mahābhārata* are

³⁴ Cf. G. J. Held (1935) and the comments on his work in chapter 2.

³⁵ Dumézil notes that, when the brothers subsequently take employment at Virāṭa's court, the younger ones take various jobs but Yudhiṣṭhira is presented as a brāhmaṇa skilled at dice, and he inaccurately remarks: 'His sole contribution to the action of the *Mahābhārata* comes down to two games of dice which he plays as king' (1948: 49).

followed by a dicing match and that dicing is prescribed as mandatory after the anointing in the *rājasūya* ritual. He also adduces other parallels between the structure of the *Sabhāparvan* and the *rājasūya* sequence of events in support of his view that the *Sabhāparvan* is structurally an epic dramatisation of the Vedic ritual. These views are not necessarily incompatible and probably the best view of the situation is one that acknowledges the redistributive element in the sacrificial ritual and also recognises that the economic system of the early epic is undeveloped.

Certainly, it is broadly true that mentions of trade and other economic activity are largely absent from the basic narrative, but this is also explicable, of course, in terms of its overall interests. Wealth is there for display and for the ceremonial gifts given by a chief to others, whether by the superior as a way of marking his dominance or by the subordinate chiefs in the form of tribute. The elaborate description of the gifts brought to Yudhiṣṭhira's *rājasūya* (2.47–48) conforms to this pattern, despite the lateness of many of the details of both peoples and products and probably of the passage as a whole in its present form; indeed, the passage repeatedly states that various groups were denied admission until their tribute was increased sufficiently.³⁶ The most frequently mentioned items of tribute are gold, horses, elephants and slave-girls, but clothing of various sorts also appears quite prominently. Although many of the items thus brought as tribute would have been among the commodities traded in the early centuries A.D., the passage contains not a hint of this. Again, the items staked by Yudhiṣṭhira in the dice match provide a good indication of what counted as wealth (2.53.22–54.29); these start with a necklace of pearls set in gold and continue with a hundred jars filled with a thousand *nīkas* each, a fine chariot drawn by eight horses, a thousand elephants in musth with eight females each, a hundred thousand young slave girls, as many male slaves, as many chariots along with their horses, drivers and warriors, Gandharva horses, many carts and draft animals along with sixty thousand broad-chested men selected from each *varṇa*, and four hundred coffers encased in copper and iron and each holding five buckets of beaten gold. Elsewhere Arjuna is mentioned as winning wealth and girls by his military exploits (3.79.26) and this is a typical pattern. Strikingly, however, there is

³⁶ Comment on this passage and a tabulation of the items brought can be found in Thapar 1977–78.

no mention in such listings of wealth of any privately owned land (Yudhiṣṭhīra's staking of his city and his country at 2.58.7 is on a different level).

There is a notable absence of any reference to a money economy and even in the main of mention of coins in the narrative. The *nīṣka*, which is often reckoned as money later, still has its older meaning of a gold chest or neck ornament (for example *nīṣkakan̄thyah svalam̄kṛtāḥ*, 2.54.12d), though already being used as a convenient measure of gold, for instance in the distribution of *dakṣinā* to officiating priests. There are probably a few references to punch-marked coins but even so reckoned by quantity rather than number (for example in *kṛtākṛtyasya mukhyasya kanakasyāgnivarcasāḥ | manusyabhārān* at 1.213.46 and *pañca-drauṇika ekaikāḥ suvarṇasyāhatasya vai* at 2.54.28cd). There are occasional references to richly jewelled articles (an armlet, an earring, a sword-hilt or the like) but these are infrequent, indicating either that such articles were rare, luxury items in the early period of the text or that they have been introduced into the text as part of later embellishments. A brief description of a bejewelled seat, draped with a valuable covering (12.312.42) could well be a reminiscence of Kuṣāṇa style furniture. The elaborate description by Duryodhana at 2.47–48 of the tribute brought to the Pāṇḍavas—with its reference to jade vases and ivory-hilted swords (2.47.114ab), silk from China (2.47.22), beryls, pearls and conches brought by the Śiṃhalas and the like—is as little typical of the main narrative as are the lists of peoples bringing them, commented on further below; the passage is clearly a later elaboration of around the 1st–2nd century A.D., intended for the greater glory of the Pāṇḍavas. It is no surprise, therefore, that it contains one of the few references to gold, meaning coins, by totals (*kotiśāś caiva bahuśāḥ suvarṇam̄ padmasaṃmitam | balim ādāya* at 2.47.27).

Other younger passages also contain references to coinage. Indeed, the number contest between Bandin and Aṣṭāvakra contains the statement that eight *sānas* make up a *śatamāna* (3.134.14a), giving the names of two known early coin denominations. The reference in the Nala episode to Rūparṇa agreeing Nala's wage as *aśvādhyakṣa* is probably best understood as 100 of the latter coin, with *śata* used as a shortened form of it (*vetanam te śatam śatāḥ* at 3.64.6d), as Agrawala argues.³⁷ Equally, mentions of large numbers without other indication

³⁷ Agrawala 1956: 16.

of value probably imply the commonest coin in early India, the silver *kārsāpana*, as when in the dicing game Yudhiṣṭhīra calls the chariot he stakes *sahasrasamita*, ‘worth a thousand’ (2.54.4, cf. 2.32.10). In addition, Belvalkar in the Critical Notes on the verse regards *pratikam ca śatam vrddhyā* at 2.5.68c—part of the late *kaccit* chapter—as a reference to the *prati* as an equivalent of the *kārsāpana*, although the passage can be interpreted differently.

The narrative books do in fact already contain some references to trade. Perhaps the most notable example occurs in the *Nalopākhyāna* when Damayantī as she wanders in the forest meets a large caravan (*mahāsārtha*) using bullocks, donkeys, camels and horses to transport their goods, and the caravan leader (*sārthavāha*) tells her that they are travelling from Vidarbha to the Cedi country (3.61.106–62.10), but caravans are also mentioned elsewhere occasionally (e.g. 10.5.3a and 9.38a). Various trades and professions are mentioned rather haphazardly, often simply in similes; for example, the earth stained with blood is compared to cloth dyed red with *mahārajana*, the dyestuff produced from the safflower (*Carthamus tinctorius L.*, 8.36.9); however, the fullest reference to weaving comes in the mainly prose *Pausyaparvan*, where two women weaving black and white threads on a loom are identified as Dhātā and Vidhātā weaving night and day in an elaborate year allegory (1.3.147–173). On other occasions references are incidental to an episode which mainly reveals the older pattern; for example, when Duryodhana and his followers set out on the cattle expedition, *ghosayātrā*, to Dvaitavana after gaining Dhṛtarāṣṭra’s reluctant permission, they are also accompanied by carts, merchandise, prostitutes, traders and bards (*śakaṭāpanaveśyāś ca vanijo bandinas tathā*, 3.228.27ab; cf. *śakaṭāpanaveśyāś ca*, 15.29.21a), as well as by hunters, while a little later in the episode Duryodhana, concerned about what people who matter will say, refers to brāhmans and heads of guilds (*brāhmaṇāḥ śrenimukhyāś ca*, 3.238.15a, cf. for example 12.59.49c). Again, a simile refers to the plight of merchants when their ship is smashed on the boundless ocean (9.18.2). In a late passage Vaiśampāyana describes the ideal situation following Rāma Jāmadagnya’s extermination of the *kṣatriyas* as one where, among other things, merchants did not sell their wares with false weights (1.58.20).

In the didactic parts urban centres as commercial entities are familiar and the needs of the mercantile community are recognised, while the term *naigama* (e.g. 13.153.4b) also occurs alongside *vanij* to denote a leading trader or merchant. In the *kaccit adhyāya* Nārada

asks Yudhiṣṭhīra whether the customs officials only take the agreed duties from merchants coming from a distance (2.5.103–4) and seafaring merchants are mentioned quite casually (e.g. 12.163.2). Even here references to humbler occupations are quite likely to be incidental, as for example in the reference to weaving in the simile, ‘just as the weaver makes the thread move back and forth by means of the shuttle in the cloth’ (*sūcyā sūtram yathā vaste samsārayati vāyakah*, 12.210.34ab) or casual mention of vegetable-cooks, sauce-cooks and sweetmeat-makers to attend Dhṛtarāṣṭra (*ārālikāḥ sūpakārā rāgakhāṇḍavikāś tathā*, 15.1.17ab).³⁸ However, agriculture remains the major source of revenue. For example, in the late *kaccit adhyāya* Nārada advises Yudhiṣṭhīra to excavate large tanks for irrigation (2.5.67), and the regular order of mention of economic activity places commerce after agriculture and stock-breeding (e.g. *kṛṣigorakṣyavāṇijyam* at 12.89.23a, cf. 24ab, 68.21ab, etc.). Another verse in the *kaccit adhyāya* envisages loans to farmers at a preferential rate of 1% interest (*pratikam ca śatam vriddhyā dadāsy ṣṇam anugraham*, 2.5.68cd).

In the older passages gifts are largely incidental to the narrative, are mainly of gold and livestock, and are distributed widely, whereas the giving of gifts, especially gifts of land, to deserving brāhmans, is predominant in the didactic parts; it is no accident that the major part of the *Anuśāsanaparvan* is the *Dānadharmaparvan*. The Śānti and *Anuśāsana parvans* do indeed praise various kings extravagantly for their generosity and the size of the gifts is correspondingly enormous. To Yudhiṣṭhīra’s question about what form of gift is best Bhīṣma replies that the gift of land, *bhūmidāna*, surpasses all other gifts, while also praising the gift of food and declaring that one should give the three things denoted by the word *go*: cows, land and speech (13.61–68). One late passage recognises the alienation of revenues in the form of *brahmadeya*, *agrahāra*, *parihāra* and the gift of a previous ruler (15.16.15).

Wildlife and agriculture

The *kṣatriya* interest in hunting is one of several factors in the frequency of mention of wildlife of various sorts. Usually this is for food more

³⁸ Similarly, in the late moral fable of the man in the well in the *Śrīparvan* there is incidental reference to specific parts of the structure of a well, *dīnāha* and *velā* (11.5.13c), explained in the Critical Notes as ‘the circular masonry on the top of a well’ and ‘the circular edge’ respectively.

than for sport, as is clearly seen for example in 3.47 where Yudhiṣṭhira hunts *ruru* and *kṛṣṇamṛga* to feed his brothers and Draupadī, as well as the brāhmaṇas living in the forest, although elsewhere he deplores the injury, *himṣā*, involved (3.257.9), while earlier in the same book Vyāsa advises him to move to another forest in order to avoid depletion of the game (cf. 3.37.33). The curse pronounced on Pāṇḍu by the deer when he is shot while mating perhaps implies certain ideas of sportsmanship (1.109). However, elsewhere the scenes of carnage as Duḥṣanta goes hunting, at the start of the *Śakuntalopākhyana* (1.63), rival anything achieved by the trophy hunters during the British Raj. Kṛṣṇa lists women, dice, hunting and drink as the four vices that spring from desire (3.14.7).

Another factor, however, is the tendency by later redactors to ornament passages with more elaborate descriptions of scenery, which often become virtually catalogues of fauna and flora. The consequent clustering of references is clearly visible in the data which Mehendale has collected on the flora and fauna in the *Āranyakaparvan*.³⁹ Thus, in the Nala episode, when Damayantī enters another forest, it contains *sāla*, *veṇu*, *dhava*, *aśvattha*, *tinduka*, *īnguda*, *kimṣuka*, *arjuna*, *ariṣṭa*, *candana*, *śālmala*, *jambu*, *āmra*, *lodhra*, *khadira*, *śāka*, *vetra*, *kāśmarī*, *āmalaka*, *plava*, *kadamba*, *udumbara*, *badarī*, *bilva*, *nyagrodha*, *priyāla*, *tāla*, *kharjūra*, *harītaka* and *bibhitaka* trees and is inhabited by lions, tigers, wild boar, bears, *ruru* deer and elephants, as well as crickets (3.61.1–5), a mountain in it is adorned with *kimṣuka*, *āsoka*, *bakula* and *pumnāga* trees (61.37) and a river is fringed with reeds (*vetasa*) and inhabited by *krauñca*, *kurara*, *cakravāka*, *kūrma*, *jhaṣa* and *graha* (61.107–8); the tendency to group the names alliteratively is obvious. Similarly, the Gandhamādana forest contains *āmra*, *āmrātaka*, *nārikela*, *tinduka*, *ajātaka*, *jīra*, *dādima*, *bijapūraka*, *panasa*, *likuca*, *moca*, *kharjūra*, *āmravetasa*, *pārāvata*, *kṣaudra*, *nīpa*, *bilva*, *kapitha*, *jambu*, *kāśmarī*, *badarī*, *plakṣa*, *udumbara*, *vāta*, *aśvattha*, *kṣīrin*, *bhallātaka*, *āmalaka*, *harītaka*, *bibhitaka*, *īnguda*, *karavīra*, *tinduka* (again), *campaka*, *āsoka*, *ketaka*, *bakula*, *pumnāga*, *saptaparna*, *karnikāra*, *ketaka* (again), *paṭala*, *kūṭaja*, *mandāra*, *indīvara*, *pāryāta*, *kovidāra*, *devadāru*, *sāla*, *tāla*, *tamāla*, *priyāla*, *bakula* (again), *śālmalī*, *kimṣuka*, *āsoka* (again), *śīṁśāpa* and *tarala* (155.40–46), is inhabited by *cakora*, *śatapatra*, *bhr̥ingarāja*, *śuka*, *kokila*, *kalaviṅka*, *hārīta*, *jiṇavīwaka*, *priyavrata*, *cātaka* and other birds (47–48), and its lakes are filled with *kumuda*, *pūḍarīka*, *kokanada*, *utpalā*, *kahlāra* and *kamala* lotuses and frequented by *kadamba*, *cakravāka*, *kurara*,

³⁹ Mehendale 1986 and 1987.

jalakukkuṭa, kāraṇḍava, plava, hamsa, baka, madgu and other aquatic birds (49–50), while the more extended description in the rest of the chapter adds *tamarasa, padma, kamala, sindhuvāra, karṇikāra, kurubaka, tilaka, saha-kāra, śāla, tāla, tamāla, pāṭalī, bakula, padma* and *utpala* to the flora and *madhukara, śikhāndinī, mayūra, elephant, lion, tiger, śarabha, rājahamsa, sārasa, cakora, śatapatra, kokila, śārika, jīvajīwaka, sārasa, bhṛigarāja, upacakra* and *lohapṛṣṭha* to the fauna (51–77). Another shorter list of trees on the banks of the Sarasvatī in Dvaitavana comprises *plakṣa, aksa, rauhitaka, vetasa, snuha, badarī, khadirā, śirīṣa, bilva, īnguda, pīlu, śamī* and *karīra* (174.23), whereas another list elsewhere of trees growing beside the Sarasvatī consists of *badarī, īngudī, kāśmarya, plakṣa, aśvattha, vibhītaka, panasa, palāśa, karīra, pīlu, bandhana, syandana, parūṣaka, bilva, āmrātaka, atimuktaka, pārijāta* and *kadaī* (9.36.58–60); although there is some overlap the divergences are striking and confirm the artificiality of such lists. Similarly, the fauna living on the Himālaya are listed as: *simha, vyāghra, bhṛigarāja, hamsa, dātyūha, jalakukuta, mayūra, śatapatra, kokila, jīvajīwaka, cakora, putrapriya* and *sārasa* (107.6–9). Though typical of the expansions to the narrative books (for example, 1.199.39–45), such lists are also found occasionally in the didactic sections (for example, a list of trees, animals and birds on the Himālaya at 13.14.29–33).

Outside these lists, lotuses are quite commonly mentioned in the *Āranyakaparvan* under various names (in addition to those already noted, also *ambuja, kumuda, nalina, nalīnī, puṣkara, mṛṇātī, rājīva* and *śatapatra*), but other flora are less frequent; those occurring are *atasīpuṣpa* (186.86), *arka* (220.14), *arjuna* (also 3.25.17), *alābu* (104.18), *ásoka* (also 61.97), *aśvattha* (also 115.23 and 42), *āmalaka* (also 111.12), *āmra* (also 25.17 and 87.2), *īnguda* (also 111.12), *iṣīka* (266.67), *udumbara* (also 115.23), *kanṭaka* (282.5), *kadamba* (also 25.17, 219.39, 220.24 and 249.1), *kadaī* (144.4, 146.42, 44, 53, 60, 149.4, 252.9 and 275.14), *karaṇja* (219.34), *karavīra* (also 220.23 and 296.43), *karṇikāra* (also 25.17), *kātīyaka* (a type of sandalwood, 175.10—also at 11.26.28b), *kimṣuka* (also 103.11 and 264.32), *kunda* (119.4), *kuśa* (239.17, 250.1, 263.30, 267.32, 279.4, 282.5), *ketaka* (also 296.43), *khadira* (also 268.3), *japā* (220.23), *tāla* (also 25.17, 99.5, 260.12 etc.), *tilaka* (also 3.111.16 and 263.33), *tunga* (175.10), *darbha* (239.16), *devadāru* (also 175.10 and 212.13), *dhanvana* (111.12), *nala* (252.9), *nīpa* (also 25.17 and 179.14), *nīvāra* (179.14), *nyagrodha* (also 186.81 and 295.15), *parūṣaka* (111.12), *palāśa* (281.107), *pārijāta* (also 296.41), *pippala* (296.43), *priyangu* (87.2), *priyāla* (also 111.12), *plakṣa* (also 82.5 and 129.13), *badarī* (also 145.10, 17–19),

bibhitaka (also 70.6, 34 and 36), *bhallātaka* (also 111.12), *madhūka* (25.17), *muriya* (12.49), *muru* (13.26), *yavasa* (62.3), *vata* (also 85.8), *vānīra* (87.2), *venu* (also 12.58 and 252.9), *vetasa* (also 184.23 and 296.43), *śamī* (also 262.30), *śara* (214.10 and 268.27), *śāla* (also 25.17, 36.24, 260.12 etc.), *śālmali* (also 133.9), *śirīṣa* (also 267.10 and 268.27), *santānaka* (220.23), *sarja* (25.17, 111.16 and 268.4), *sindhuvāra* (also 296.43) and *haricandana* (175.10).

Other wild fauna occurring in the *Āranyakaparvan* outside these lists are *ajagara* (60.20, 171.1, 12–16, 178.45), *uraga* (54.6, 60.26, 61.7 etc.), *ulūka* (170.45 and 191.4), *rksa* (61.2, 8, 37, 123, 170.42, etc.), *rīya* (251.12), *aineya* (flesh of *ena*, black antelope, 251.12), *kanka* (255.31), *kacchapa* (166.3 and 191.14), *kadamba* (also 161.5), *kāpi* (3.267.1, 51 etc.), *kapota* (3.130.19, 131.25, 28, 246.4 and 5), *karabha* (3.264.45), *karenū* (25.19, 98.15 and 262.37), *karkatākī* (252.9), *kalahamsa* (155.85), *kāka* (266.67), *kākola* (255.31), *kāraṇḍava* (also 39.18, 150.26, 151.6, 161.5, 175.9 and 263.40), *kīta* (266.38), *kukkuṭa* (214.23, 24, 215.10 and 218.32), *kurari* (60.19, 128.4 and 170.56), *kürma* (also 82.10 and 170.46), *kṛṣnamrga* (47.7), *kokila* (also 25.18, 39.18, 98.13 etc.), *kroṣṭuka* (248.17) and *kroṣṭr* (248.17), *krauñca* (also 39.18 and 179.10), *khadyota* (122.19), *gavaya* (229.10 and 251.12), *grdhra* (48.33, 170.44, 214.31 etc.), *gopuccha* (266.6 and 275.55), *godhā* (18.3, 38.16, 143.1, 262.19 and 267.17), *gomāyu* (34.3, 48.33, 253.7, 255.31 and 263.22), *grāha* (101.9 and 102.22), *cakora* (also 25.18 and 175.7), *cakravāka* (also 150.26 and 175.7), *cāmara* (240.42), *jīvaka* (98.13), *jīvajīvaka* (also 175.7), *jhaṣa* (also 99.17, 170.45 and 266.44), *tarakṣu* (146.48 and 229.10), *tittiri* (79.24), *timi* (18.7 and 266.4), *timimgila* (166.3), *damṣa* (142.27, 145.20 and 179.4), *dardura* (179.8), *dātyūha* (also 25.18), *dvīpin* (also 61.123), *nakra* (101.9, 266.44 and 268.3), *nāga* ('snake', 63.4, 64.1, etc.), *nyāṅku* (251.12), *pataṅga* (2.65), *pannaga* (also 63.7, 170.7, 43 etc.), *piṇḍika* (122.3 and 127.6), *piṭhasarpa* (26.21), *pr̥sata* (251.12), *plavaga* (264.13, 266.13, 25–29, 52), *plavamgama* (149.2, 266.30, 271.2–3), *baka* (also 33.7, 191.9 and 297.11), *barhina* (39.18 and 229.13) and *barhin* (146.26 and 255.11), *balākā* (84.11 and 197.3–5), *bhāsa* (255.31), *bhujaga* (332.16) and *bhujamga* (60.27 and 107.11), *bhrigarāja* (also 175.7), *bhramara* (34.68, 167.22, 229.13 and 296.41), *makara* (105.23, 166.3, 170.44, 254.19, 261.53 and 275.51), *maksikā* (142.27), *maṇḍūka* (190.30ff), *matsya* (2.39, 80.103 etc.), *mayūra* (also 25.18, 83.29, 161.4, 169.23 and 280.30), *maśaka* (142.27 and 145.20), *mahādvipa* (25.19), *mārjāra* (170.43), *mīna* (34.27, 170.46, 268.3), *raṅku* (225.9), *ruru* (47.7, 146.45, 251.12), *rauhī* (265.7), *lakṣmanā* ('kind of heron', 169.21), *varāha* (also 98.14, 179.7, 229.10)

etc.), *vartikā* (176.42), *vāyasa* (176.44, 186.37, 188.81 and 255.31), *vṛka* (251.8), *vyāghra* (also 12.54, 98.18, 146.39 etc.), *vyāla* (2.3, 59.21, 243.21, 253.2 and 22, 264.50 and 265.25), *śambara* (251.12), *śarabha* (134.14, 170.43, 251.12), *śalabha* (167.23), *śāśa* (80.120, 251.12 and 266.2), *śākhāmṛga* (251.3, 266.61, 63, 276.11), *śārdūla* (also 98.14, 150.21, 262.28 and 268.18), *śālavṛka* (170.43 and 253.8), *sīkhan* (71.6–7 and 179.8), *śīva* (176.41, 186.36 and 281.74), *śṛgāla* (253.19), *śyena* (130.19, 28 and 253.24), *śvāpada* (64.18), *satpada* (also 98.13), *sarīrpa* (2.3, 142.27 and 179.4), *sarpa* (222.1, 225.13 and 259.25), *sārasa* (also 39.18, 296.8 and 11 etc.), *simha* (also 48.39, 71.12, 98.16 etc.), *suparna* (83.67, 140.11, 156.18, 157.14, 19, 214.9, 215.4 and 253.5), *śrmara* (98.14 and 170.43), *stokaka* (179.8), *hamsa* (39.18, 50.18–19, 30–31 etc.), *hari* (monkey, 150.3, 266.17 etc.), *hari* (lion, 252.7), and *hariṇa* (146.28, 150.20, 25, 251.12). Many of the terms for monkeys occur mainly or exclusively in the *Rāmopākhyāna* (*kapi*, *gopuccha*, *plavaga*, *plavaṅgama*, *śākhāmṛga* and *hari*), but so also do *kāka* (again determined by the narrative), *rauhī* and *sūkara* among the fauna and *iṣīka*, *khadira* and *śīriṣa* among the flora. Detailed analysis of these occurrences, comparable to that of the *Rāmāyaṇa* material in chapter eight, would no doubt reveal interesting patterns.

Although the setting of the *Āranyakaparvan* means that it has in general the widest and most representative range of wild flora and fauna, there are quite a few terms which occur only in other books. For example, the term *vṛṣadamśa* occurs at 6.2.25b, 9.43.25c, 44.79d and 12.102.17d, while the derivative *vāṛṣadamśa* to denote the skins of the animal occurs at 2.47.3a (brought as tribute to the Pāṇḍavas by the Kāmbojas); despite the identification by the lexicographers as a cat, the animal in question is almost certainly larger in size and so probably denotes a wild feline of about the size of a leopard.⁴⁰ Incidentally, the terms *bidāla* (8.27.51a, etc.) and *mārjāra* (also for example at 13.14.33d) in fact also denote wild cats. Some other wild fauna only mentioned in other books are *ākuḥ* ‘mouse or rat’ (passim), *indragopaka* ‘rain-mite’ (Acarus genus, 4.38.44a), *uddīpaka* ‘firefly’ (13.107.107a), *kuranga* ‘antelope’ (13.14.33c), *kṛmi* ‘worm’ (18.2.19b), *khañjarīta* ‘wagtail’ (Motacilla alba L., 12.314.5a), *khadga* ‘rhinoceros’ (13.110.67d), *cāṣa* ‘Blue Jay’ (Coracias benghalensis benghalensis, 6.2.28b, 12.103.11b, etc.), *cillikā* ‘cricket’ (7.29.19b), *cīrvāka* ‘cricket’ (13.112.95b), *bada* (unidentified, 11.16.29c), *laḍvā* (probably a small

⁴⁰ On this point see Brockington 1985b.

sparrow, 8.29.40c) and *sālāvṛka* ‘wolf’ (7.29.19c). Instances of flora only found in other books include *aguru* ‘aloe wood’ (e.g. 12.163.8b), *atimuktaka* (Hiptage madhoblata Gaertn., e.g. 9.36.60a), *tvaksāra* ‘bamboo’ (6.5.17d = 13.99.23d), *tvaca* ‘cinnamon’ (12.163.8b), *pipīlika* ‘udumbara fruit’ (12.37.16), *bandhana* (unknown, 9.36.59b), *bhūlinga* (2.38.17d, 41.18d, 19a, 12.163.9c) or *kulinga* (Dicrurus paradiseus L., 12.253.20c, 28b), *mayūra* (Achyranthes aspera L., 12.264.7a), *vīṣa* (*Gloriosa superba*, 12.37.1), *sāna* ‘hemp’ (12.87.14a), *śringāta* ‘water chestnut’ (*Trapa natans*, 7.13.12a), *ślesmātaka* (*Cordia myxa* L., 12.37.16) and *syandana* (*Dalbergia ougeinensis* Roxb., e.g. 9.36.59b).

There is more emphasis on pastoralism in the earlier narrative, and on the heroic implications of the cattle-raid, but this gradually changes to agriculture in the didactic parts. It is no accident that two of the minor *parvans* bear the names *Ghoṣayātrāparvan* (3.225–243) and *Gograhanaparvan* (4.24–62); in the first Duryodhana organises an expedition to Dvaitavana to count the cattle and brand the calves, at the instigation of Karna who is well aware of the presence in the area of the Pāṇḍavas, and the fight with the Gandharvas may well reflect disputes over grazing and hunting rights; in the second the Trigarta king proposes to the Kauravas that they mount a cattle-raid on the Matsya kingdom. Earlier in the *Virāṭaparvan*, the Pāṇḍavas’ warning about the corpse that they place in the tree that hides their weapons is given to cowherds and shepherds (*gopāla*, *avipāla*, 4.5.29a), while Virāṭa declares that he owns a hundred thousand cows, in response to Sahadeva’s claim that Yudhiṣṭhira had herds of eight hundred, a thousand, a hundred thousand, ten thousand, twelve thousand and twenty thousand cows (4.9.9–14); exaggerated as these figures no doubt are, they do indicate the prestige attaching to possession of large numbers of cattle. The gods are worshipped with sacrifices which are often of animals, and in the relatively late dialogue between the brāhmaṇa and the righteous butcher, in self-defence but in reality as part of the swing towards *ahimsā*, the butcher counters the implicit condemnation of his occupation by referring to cows formerly being slaughtered by the thousands in sacrifices after which, it is implied, they were eaten (3.199.7–9).⁴¹ By the time of the *Śāntiparvan* this practice is sternly condemned and in one

⁴¹ The *māmsam pāśavam* (3.73.10d) that Rūtparṇa sends for Bāhuka, the disguised Nala, to prepare could well mean beef but does not do so conclusively.

episode a cow complains about the wanton carnage committed on her relatives (12.260).

When the Pāṇḍavas enter into a partition of the kingdom as a compromise, before the dicing match brings all the tensions to the surface, they are offered the uncultivated and forested Khāṇḍava tract, southwest of Hāstinapura on the bank of the Yamunā; they accept the offer and found the city of Indraprastha there. While the direction of movement is interesting as reflecting the general pattern of Aryan expansion, the event has other features of interest. Specifically, van Buitenen sees the burning of the Khāṇḍava forest, which ends the *Ādiparvan*, as intended to give room for the agriculture needed to make Indraprastha viable: ‘In order to found their own kingdom, the Pāṇḍavas need to clear the forest, which is done by fire in the form of the God of Fire.’⁴² The similarity to the myth of Agni and Videha Māthava in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* is surely no coincidence.

References to agriculture proper are relatively uncommon in the narrative parts. However, Draupadī in talking about fate says that the farmer ploughs and sows the seed but then sits and waits for the rain to do its work, and if the rains do not come it is not his fault (3.33.44–45); the absence of any idea of irrigation suggests a very early period. On the other hand, a verse in the late *kaccit adhyāya* suggests adequate reservoirs to prevent agriculture being dependent on rain (*devamāṭṛka*, 2.5.67d, cf. *KA* 5.2.2 and *Rām.* 2.94.39), while the next verse recommends—as already noted—loans by the king to farmers at a preferential rate of 1% interest, if seed and food are scarce (2.5.68). The terms *lava* and *muṣti* to denote sowing and harvest also occur in the *kaccit adhyāya* (at 2.5.54a). In general, the term *sasya* denotes wet crops, while among the crops grown both beans (*māsa*, 3.268.34) and rice (*sāli*, 3.267.18 and 268.27) are mentioned in the *Āranyakaparvan*. Elsewhere, implements such as the woodman’s axe and the spade gain mention only as part of the paraphernalia required by an army (*kūṭhāra* and *kuddāla*, 5.152.7c, cf. plough and winnowing basket in 5.543* added to this passage). However, somewhat more reference to agriculture is found in the *Śānti* and *Anuśāsana parvans*, where in addition to further mention of *sasya* (e.g. 12.69.35a and 133.15a) there are, for example, references to ploughing (*sīra*, 12.133.15b), to such minor agricultural implements as a sieve and granary basket (*pāṭī* and *piṭaka*, 12.221.59a), also to the process

⁴² *Mahābhārata* 1973–78: I, 13.

of winnowing at 12.229.4) and even to cow-dung cakes (*karīṣa*, 12.254.24c), as well as to various products, such as sesame and mustard (*tilasarpaṇa*, 12.271.14b), oil-cake (*pinyāka*, 13.112.94c) and vegetables (*śāka*, e.g. 12.264.4c). The range of cereals mentioned also now includes such humble crops as millet (*śyāmāka*, *Panicum frumentaceum* Roxb., e.g. 12.264.4a).

Domesticated animals are less frequently mentioned than wild animals; those occurring in the *Āranyakaparvan* are: *aja* (188.21, 226.19–20, 227.9), *anadvah* (184.10), *ásva* (64.6, 69.10 etc.), *ukṣan* (131.17), *uṣṭra* (62.9), *rśabha* (170.43), *ajaiḍaka* ‘rams and ewes’ (188.21), *kapilā* (80.76, 81.38, 82.8, 29 etc.), *khara* (3.62.9 and 264.64), *gaja* (11.28, 141.24, etc.), *go* (passim), *govṛṣa* (31.25), *chāga* (94.8, 217.3, 11 and 12), *nāga* (‘elephant’, 186.106 etc.), *paśu* (134.13), *mahiṣa* (61.123, 131.16, 150.21, 176.4 etc.; often grouped with wild animals), *mātaṅga* (12.56, 79.14, 255.29 etc.), *mēṣa* (97.3), *vaḍavā* (133.23 and 209.20), *vatsa* (82.77), *vājin* (141.24, 253.23, 268.6 and 273.25), *vārana* (71.6–7, 98.15, 146.45, 150.19 and 176.4), *vṛṣa* (82.85) and *vṛṣabha* (12.53, 83.11 and 292.5), *śvāna* (2.57, 29.33, 34.78 etc.), *sūkara* (262.37), *saindhava* (breed of horse, 253.6), *haya* (69.23, 33, 73.6, 76.16 etc.) and *hastin* (62.6, 65.14 etc.).

Geographical horizons

The setting of the great battle on the field of Kurukṣetra and the location of the capital at Hāstинапура indicate very clearly the geographical focus of the main narrative, which is set in the area of modern Haryana and the upper Doāb. This is somewhat further east than the basic geographic setting of the Vedic literature but much less so than that of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, which is set in the middle Gaṅgā basin, and this setting probably reflects the fact that its basic plot reaches further back in time than that of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. Indeed, as already noted in the first chapter, the Kuru alliance with the Pañcālas of Vedic times is echoed in the *Mahābhārata*, where the Pāṇḍavas’ marriage to the Pañcāla princess Draupadī is central to the plot, but nevertheless in the *Ādiparvan* they raided Drupada Yajñasena’s territory in order to please their guru, Drona. They captured the Pančāla capital of Ahicchatrā, southeast of Hāstинапура, which was however no longer on the river and so not in command of it. Drona then took away the northern half of the kingdom, including Ahicchatrā, but left Drupada his seat of Kāmpilya, on the

right bank of the Gaṅgā. As van Buitenen has pointed out, ‘archaeological evidence indicates that Ahicchatrā had been founded on the bank of the Ganges and lasted until the river changed course; and the epic expressly states that Kāmpilya was on the southern bank of the river, where its remains have been excavated. In other words, the capital seat of Pāñcāla was moved with the moving of the river; so Hāstinapura’s extension of territorial control to Ahicchatrā was little more than the appropriation of a ghost town.’⁴³

The Kurus are bordered on the southeast at Mathurā (cf. 2.13.44) by the Vṛṣnis, although they are also linked with Dvārakā (e.g. 3.16–17; its submerging by the ocean is told at 16.8.40); their chief Kṛṣṇa is naturally therefore significant in the power politics which lie at the heart of the story, while the court of Virāṭa, the Matsya king, where the Pāṇḍavas spend their year incognito, lies a little further west in the east of modern Rajasthan (Alwar, with parts of Jaipur and Bharatpur). These territories of the Kurus themselves, the Pañcālas, Vṛṣnis and Matsyas form the locale of the basic narrative and nothing of really major significance occurs outside them. However, the Vṛṣnis to the south of the Yamunā have political interests which stretch as far as the Cedis and, through them, the kingdom of Magadha, thus bringing in Central and Eastern India to some degree; but it is very noticeable that the whole of this area is seen as menacing and also as peripheral to the real action of the basic epic. By contrast, in some of the expansions to the basic narrative and in the didactic portions, definite efforts are being made to include the whole of India within the ambit of the epic. The main geographical sections included in the narrative comprise the *Digvijayaparvan* (2.23–29) and the bringing of the tribute (2.47–48), the *Tīrthayātrāparvan* (3.80–153), the *Digvarṇana* (5.107–109), the *Bhuwanakośa* (6.6–13), the enumeration of *tīrthas* on Balarāma’s pilgrimage (*Tīrthayātrāparvan*, 9.29–53), and also more briefly the *Tīrthapraśāmsā*, Bhīṣma’s recounting of a discourse by Angiras on the holy rivers (13.26). While these passages are important for an understanding of the actual state of affairs at the time of their composition in the early centuries A.D. and for the traditional geography of India, their evidence should not be regarded as relating to the period of the epic’s origins, with which at times they are incompatible. A pattern shared by many of them (and also by the search

⁴³ *Mahābhārata* 1973–78: I, 9–10.

party accounts in the *Rāmāyaṇa*) is that they are laid out according to the directions.

Thus, in the conquest of the world which precedes Yudhiṣṭhīra's *rājasūya*, his four brothers set out in the four directions. Arjuna's conquests begin with the Kuṇindas, Ānartas, and Kālakūṭa, the island of Śakala, and Prāgjyotiṣa (2.23); he then turns towards the north—in practice the northwest—and, after he has subdued the Vāhlīkas, Daradas, Kāmbojas and Lohas, his conquests culminate in his defeat of the Rṣikas, who are therefore by implication in Central Asia and possibly to be identified with the Asioi referred to by Strabo (2.24), before becoming completely mythical after his crossing of Śvetaparvata, when he conquers the territories of the Kimpruruṣas and Gandharvas and visits Lake Mānasa but desists before the Uttara Kurus (2.25). Similarly, in the lists of those who bring tribute the Daradas, Dārvas, Audumbaras, Pāradas, Vāhlīkas and Kāśmīras, among others, come together (2.48.12–13a). Śakala on the Āpagā river is identified as the city of the Vāhlīkas at 8.30.14, which suggests that at the time when that passage was composed they were in the Panjab, though following despised customs.⁴⁴

Bhīma's conquests in the east take in the Pāñcālas, the Videhas, the Daśārṇas, the king of Aśvamedha, the Pulindas, and the Cedi king Śiśupāla, who submits voluntarily (2.26); he then conquers, among others, the rulers of Kosala and Ayodhyā, the Mallas, the king of Kāśī, the Vatsas, King Janaka of Videha, the Kirātas, Jarāśamdhā's son (storming Girivraja—significantly this older capital of Magadha is called by its older name), the Pañḍras, Vaṅga, Tāmralipta and the Suhma chiefs (2.27), finally reaching the Lauhitya (also listed for example at 13.26.43c and 17.1.31d). Kṛṣṇa's conquests in the east after his killing of Jarāśamdhā, as listed by Dhṛtarāṣṭra, include the Āngas, Vaṅgas, Kalingas, Māgadhas, Kāśī and Kosala, Vatsas, Gargas, Karūṣas and Puñḍras (7.10.15).

Sahadeva's conquests in the south begin with the land of the Śurasenas, the king of the Matsyas, the Niṣādas and Kuntibhoja; he then reaches the river Narmadā, defeats two Avanti princes, accepts the homage of the king of Māhiṣmatī (probably Maheshwar in U.P., cf. 13.2.6c) defeats the kings of Tripura and Surāṣṭra, and goes

⁴⁴ Some of these peoples will be examined further in the next section on cultural and social aspects from the perspective of their status in relationship to orthodox society.

to Śūrpāraka, where he defeats the *gaṇa* called Upakṛta (2.28.1–42; Śūrpāraka is also mentioned for example at 13.26.47b); subsequently Sahadeva makes subject through envoys and exacts tribute from the Pāṇḍyas, Draviḍas, Coḍras, Keralas, Andhras, Talavanas, Kalingas and Uṣṭrakarmikas (2.28.47ef–48).⁴⁵ The mention immediately thereafter of Antioch and Rome and the city of the Yavanas (2.28.49ab) by implication places them too in the far south, which perhaps does reflect in some way the known trade links of the south with the Roman world attested in the site of Arikameḍu, near Pondicherry, in the 1st and 2nd centuries A.D. Finally, and presumably as he returns, Sahadeva receives the submission of Vibhiṣaṇa Paulastya in Bharukaccha (2.28.50–53); were it not for the explicit mention of the location, it would be tempting to see in this a reference to Rāvaṇa’s brother and successor, similar to the mention of Kosala and Ayodhyā in the east (and all implicitly recognising the story of the *Rāmāyaṇa*).

Nakula’s conquests towards the west start with Rohitaka and the desert country, the Marubhūmi, together with the lands of the Śibis, Trigartas, Ambaṣṭhas, Mālavas and others, the Utsavasamketa, Ābhīra and Śūdra *gaṇas* and all the land of the five rivers, before marching to Śakala and making an alliance with the Madra king Śalya (2.29.1–13). Pañcanada, the land of the five rivers, is also so named elsewhere (e.g. 16.8.43a) and the individual rivers occur in various contexts: Vipāśā (= Beās, e.g. 13.3.12d, 134.16a), Vitastā (= Jhelum, e.g. 13.26.7b, 134.16a), Candrabhāgā (= Chenab, e.g. 13.26.7a, 134.16b), Irāvatī (= Ravi, e.g. 13.134.16b) and Śatadru (= Satlaj, e.g. 13.134.16).⁴⁶ The Trigartas also bring tribute to Yudhiṣṭhira (2.48.13), their king Suśarman fights for the Kauravas (7.16–17) and Arjuna fights them in connection with Yudhiṣṭhira’s *aśvamedha* (14.73); the Mālavas are linked with the Kṣudrakas when they offer tribute to Yudhiṣṭhira (2.48.14) and were defeated by Kṛṣṇa (7.10.17); the Ābhīras and Śūdras are specifically located on the banks of the Sarasvatī (9ab), while elsewhere they are grouped with the Sindhu-Sauvīras and the Gandhāras (12.102.3); the Hārahūṇas are located in the west beyond the Indus (2.29.11). Nakula’s conquests next include the Mlecchas, Pahlavas and Barbaras (2.29.15); elsewhere the Śakas,

⁴⁵ Colas and Pāṇḍyas are named together in Dhṛtarāṣṭra’s list of peoples defeated by Kṛṣṇa (7.10.17b).

⁴⁶ The Gomati river named in the same context as these rivers (13.134.16d) is presumably the Gomal, a western tributary of the Indus, and different from the Gomati named at 13.31.18c, which seems to be the Gumti river in Uttar Pradesh.

Yavanas and Pahlavas are placed together in western India (6.20.13 and 12.65.13) and in 6.12 Śākadvīpa is located near the Iksu (Oxus) and Sītā rivers and the Maṇijalā river (possibly the Jaddā or the Zarafshan) flows through it.

The *Tīrthayatrāparvan* in the *Āranyakaparvan*, though containing much else besides, begins with two catalogues of *tīrthas*, the first that by Pulastya as reported by Nārada (3.80.40–83.95, repeated as Vasiṣṭha's account to Dilīpa in the *Padma Purāna*)⁴⁷ and the second that by one of the Pāṇḍavas' priests, Dhaumya (3.85–88). It is significant for the history of religious concepts that Pulastya's catalogue starts with the one major cult spot still associated with Brahmā, Puṣkara (modern Pokkhar in Rajasthan, 3.80.41, cf. 1.213.13a and 3.125.12c), and makes hyperbolic statements about its sanctity, culminating in the assertion that bathing there is equivalent to ten *aśvamedhas* or to bathing at all the *tīrthas*; the implication is that Puṣkara was a particularly important place of pilgrimage and that Brahmā was correspondingly more prominent at the period of its composition than at other periods, which is supported by the fact that the *Mahābhārata* mentions several other places associated with Brahmā. This contrasts with the reward of just one *rājasūya* gained by bathing at the Kapilāhrada in Vārāṇasī (3.82.69; Vārāṇasī is also mentioned by that name rather than the older Kāśī at 5.47.70d, for example).⁴⁸ The *tīrthas* listed cover the whole of India from Ujjayanta (3.86.18 and 20, the old name for Mt Girnar in Kathiawar) to the Vaitaranī river in Orissa (3.81.70), from Gaṅgādvāra, which is equal to the gate of heaven (3.82.23cd and 88.18b, also at 13.26.12a, and near which is Bhṛgu-tunga, 3.88.20d, cf. 1.207.2c), to Kanyātīrtha on the shore of the ocean (= Kanyākumārī, 3.83.21ab). Vinaśana is mentioned as the spot where the Sarasvatī river disappeared in the desert out of hatred for the Niśādas (around Ambala, 3.80.118a and 130.5, also 9.36.2); however, the Sarasvatī is called 'strong-flowing', *oghavaṭī*, at 3.130.3ab and elsewhere the term is used as a name, probably still of the Sarasvatī (e.g. 9.37.4, 12.50.7d, 13.2.83a). The Viṣṇupada mentioned later in the *Tīrthayatrāparvan* (3.130.8 and elsewhere) is located in the Kashmir area and thus is obviously different from the Viṣṇupadagiri associated with the Aṅga country in the *Śāntiparvan*.

⁴⁷ Cf. Belvalkar 1939 and Vaidya 1941.

⁴⁸ Cf. the comments in the third chapter (p. 135), in relation to dating, of this reference to Vārāṇasī.

(12.29.31) and so presumably to be linked with modern Gayā. Even within Pulastya's catalogue there are three different Koṭītīrthas—one at Mahākāla (3.80.68), one at Pañcanada (3.81.14) and one at Gaṅgādvāra (3.82.23–24)—but the term is perhaps descriptive either of the merit acquired or the offerings made rather than a proper name.⁴⁹ The description of Ujjānaka, lying in a sea of sand and periodically raising a huge dust cloud and an earthquake (3.193.15–22), suggests a volcanic eruption and the name may well denote the mountains of Dardistan.

The *Digvarṇana* in the *Udyogaparvan* (5.107–109) occurs in the context of the late *Gālavacarita*, where Garuḍa appears in order to help Gālava and describes to him the eastern, southern, western and northern quarters in successive *adhyāyas*. In reality it is entirely concerned with a mythical geography, a mark perhaps of the general lateness of the passage; similarly mythical is the brief passage on the four *dvīpas*, Jambū, Krauñca, Bhadrāśva and Śāka, surrounding Mt Meru in the *Rājadharma-parvan* (12.14.21–25). By contrast, the *Bhuvanakośa* (6.6–13) is concerned with real political geography and has also been the subject of numerous previous studies;⁵⁰ Agrawala emphasises the extent to which its authors were familiar with the geography of Central Asia.⁵¹

Although the enumeration of *tīrthas* on Balarāma's pilgrimage in the *Śalyaparvan* (9.29–53) is nominally a pilgrimage along the Sarasvatī (of which the source is said to be Brahmāsaras, 9.41.29 and 50.19), it has considerable overlaps with the better known *Tīrthayātrā-parvan* in the *Āranyakaparvan*.⁵² The *tīrthas* visited from his starting point at Upaplavya (a city of the Matsyas) are Prabhāsa (Somnath on the southern coast of Surāṣṭra, also at 3.118.15d, 119.1a, 130.7ab, 13.105.45a and 16.4.9a), Camasodbheda (the point of re-emergence of the Sarasvatī, also 3.130.5a), Trita's well, Vinaśana (cf. above), Subhūmika, Gandharvatīrtha, Gargasrotas, Śaikhatīrtha, Dvaitavana (between Tangana and Kurukṣetra), Nāgadhanvan (the abode of

⁴⁹ Swaran Prabha (1992) has examined the evidence, noting a link with Śaivism, and suggests that the name (which he treats only as that) was perhaps originally associated with the western part of Kurukṣetra, travelling from there to other *tīrtha* complexes.

⁵⁰ The most significant studies are Kirfel (1920) and W. Schubring's review (1921); and S. K. Belvalkar 1939.

⁵¹ Agrawala 1956: 8–11.

⁵² Specifically, 3.81.98–115 are closely paralleled by 9.37.34–49 and 9.50.47 is identical to 3.113.12 (also 12.310.6 and Manu 2.154).

Vāsuki), *tīrthas* in the east, Naimiṣeya kuñja (modern Nimsar on the Gomati), Saptasārasvata (including Puṣkara), Gayā (cf. 3.82.71a, 93.10a and 13.26.40a), Auśanasa or Kapālamocana (cf. 3.81.116–8), Pṛthūdaka (Ruṣangu's hermitage, modern Pehoa, cf. 3.81.122–8), Baka Dālbhya's *āśrama*, Yāyātatīrtha, Vasiṣṭhapavāha at Sthāṇutīrtha (Thanesar, just south of Ambala), Arunātīrtha, Somatīrtha (cf. 3.81.96), Aujasatīrtha, Agnitīrtha, Kauberatīrtha, Badarapācana, Indratīrtha, Rāmatīrtha (presumably not the usual one near Śūrpāraka), Yamunātīrtha, Ādityatīrtha, Sārasvatamunitīrtha, Vṛddhakanyātīrtha, Kurukṣetra, Viṣṇu's *āśrama*, Plakṣaprasravaṇa (the source of the Sarasvatī, cf. 3.82.5 and 129.13), Kārapacana, and the hermitage of Mitra and Varuṇa.

The ruler of Prasthala (9.26.40d) is elsewhere called the ruler of the Trigartas (6.71.19b); Prasthala is usually held to be modern Bāhmanābād and to be the place referred to in Greek sources as Patalene, while the Trigartas are located between the Ravi and Satlaj rivers. The city of Mālinī is mentioned just by that name (12.5.6b), but later it is known as Campā, as the *Harivamśa* states (23.38). However, the basic narrative does not mention anywhere as far east as this nor anywhere south of the Vindhya, although changes in the pattern of naming is happening throughout, as the example already mentioned of the name Vārāṇasī joining Kāśī illustrates.

Cultural and social aspects

The social setting in which the epic proper takes place is that of a mainly rural society. The few cities (*nagara, pura*), despite their sometimes elaborate buildings in the descriptions, are really larger versions of the villages (*grāma, ghosa, pali*), which are usually protected by a fort. However the walls or ramparts (*vapra, caya*) of these forts, like those of towns, would more probably have been of earth than stone. Large tracts of land and forests are owned by, for instance, Virāṭa, who is basically a cattle baron; when the death of his general Kīcaka becomes known, a raiding party of Trigartas begins to rustle his cattle; Virāṭa's capital is really quite a modest town and the rest of the Matsya territory contains just villages, hamlets and hermitages, while his people raise crops and tend cattle.

As noted above, between the earlier and later stages of the epic, the role of the brāhmaṇa in court life develops from the limited one of *purohita*, who performs religious ceremonies on the king's behalf,

to that of the expert in politics, who advises him on all matters. Much of the didactic part of the *Mahābhārata* is concerned to lay down in the most emphatic terms the rights and privileges of the brāhmans; this is found most obviously in the *Śānti* and *Anuśāsana parvans* but also occurs sporadically elsewhere, as in much of the *Prajāgaraparvan* (5.33–41). On the other hand the narrative tends to stress *kṣatriya* values and their distinctiveness from other groups, including the brāhmans; for example, Indra persuades king Vasu Uparicara to abandon austerities and be a good *kṣatriya* (1.57.1–9). Elsewhere Bhīma reproves Arjuna by suggesting that he is speaking like a hermit who has gone to the forest and has abandoned use of force and then punningly declares that the *kṣatriya* is so called because he protects from destruction, though living by destruction, and quickly gains the earth, duty, glory and prosperity (*ksatāt trātā kṣatāj jīvan kṣāntas triṣv api sādhusu | kṣatriyah kṣitim āpnoti kṣipram dharmaṇ yaśāḥ śriyam*, 7.168.4). Though shown by the form of its expression to be relatively late, this verse in fact sums up well the general attitude of the narrative that the duty of the warrior is to fight and so death in battle is to be applauded, whereas to die in one's bed is a disgrace (e.g. 6.17.11). At a lower level, this *kṣatriya* ethos involves a readiness to take offence at any slight (e.g. 3.28.34–36) and, in addition to the passion for hunting noted earlier in this chapter, includes a liking for drink; for example, when Saṃjaya arrives as envoy to the Pāṇḍavas, he describes Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna as being drunk with mead (*ubhau madhvāsavakṣibau*, 5.58.5a).

About the common people and the slaves we learn very little, for the early epic is in general just not interested in them, while the later parts discuss the caste system in a largely theoretical fashion (just as in the roughly contemporary *dharmaśāstras*). One example of just how casually they can be treated is found in the story of the lac house, where the Pāṇḍavas ensure that a Niṣāda woman and her five sons are burnt in the fire, so that their escape will not be realised (1.136–7); this excites no real comment or condemnation but rather is seen as a clever ruse. Equally, there is no surprise when Kīcaka propositions Draupadī in disguise as a *śairamdhri* (4.13–15)—it is only because she is really Draupadī that there is any offence. It is, therefore, clearly only theoretical when didactic passages suggest that conduct is more important than birth or can even modify it (as in the dialogue between a brāhmaṇ and a hunter, at 3.203.11–12). Slaves are mentioned from time to time, often in extremely large numbers as in the

instances of the tribute brought to Yudhiṣṭhīra and his stakes in the dice game cited earlier, but they seem invariably to have been domestic servants, particularly employed in entertaining guests, and there is no indication of use of slave labour for production in agriculture, manufacture or mining. Female slaves may well have satisfied their masters sexually, if Karṇa's jeers at Draupadī after the dice match mean anything (2.63.1–3). Most slaves were apparently reduced to that state as a result of capture in war but some were enslaved for debt (or through the loss of a bet, as also in the stories of Kadrū and Vinatā and of Devayānī and Śarmiṣṭhā at 1.14 and 1.73–78) and the children of slaves were themselves slaves. The *Śāntiparvan* lays down that captives of war were to be released after a year, if they wished (cf. 12.97.3–4).

In general, the narrative part of the *Mahābhārata* shows little interest in the theoretical side of *varṇa* and related concepts. At one point Baka Dālbhya advises Yudhiṣṭhīra at some length that *kṣatriyas* are heavily dependent on brāhmans for their success (3.27). Two single verses recapitulate the *Puruṣasūkta* scheme of the origin of the four classes (3.187.13 and 8.23.32), while three passages indicate their duties or their qualities (5.29.20–24, 6.40.41–44/BhG. 18.41–44, 10.3.18–20);⁵³ the first of these in fact seems relatively late, in view of its more elaborate metre and its use of the term *cāturvarṇya*, 'the four-caste system'.⁵⁴ Kuntī, in her message for Kṛṣṇa to deliver to the Pāṇḍavas, declares that a brāhmaṇa should live on alms, a *kṣatriya* should protect, a *vaiśya* should engage in acquiring wealth and a *sūdra* should serve them (5.130.26, cf. for example 12.92.3–5). Nevertheless, the relative brevity and simplicity of most such passages is in marked contrast to the extensive passages occurring in the *Sānti* and *Anuśāsanaparvans*.

The longer story of the antagonism between the brāhmaṇa Vasiṣṭha and the *kṣatriya* Viśvāmitra (1.165) on the surface points to the separateness and mutual distinctiveness of the *varṇas* but presents a slightly different picture if examined more carefully. When Viśvāmitra resorts to force in his attempt to seize Vasiṣṭha's wonder-cow, she

⁵³ The material in this and the next few paragraphs is drawn from Brockington 1995a.

⁵⁴ The use of such a derivative term obviously follows at some interval the development of the system itself. The word also occurs for example at 3.177.18a, 6.26.13a (= BhG. 4.13a), 8.23.33b, 12.25.31c and 181.6a, also Hv. 31.94c and 96c, and Rām. 1.1.75c, 24.15c, 5.33.11b, 6.113.29c and 7.65.14d.

aids Vasiṣṭha by creating various war-like groups: Pahlavas, Śabarās, Śakas, Yavanas, Pundras, Kirātas, Dramidas, Simhalas, Barbaras, Daradas and Mlecchas, collectively summed up as *mlecchas* (1.165.35–37). Besides providing an approximate dating for this passage, since the Pahlava, Śaka and Yavana rulers were politically significant in the Northwest around the beginning of the Christian era, their mention is interesting because their role here is to defend brāhmaṇical values; somewhat similarly the *dharmaśāstras* classify them as ‘degenerate *kṣatriyas*’ in recognition of their status as rulers.⁵⁵ Elsewhere a Yavana ruler attends Yudhiṣṭhīra’s court (2.4.22b) and Yavanas are regarded as ‘knowing everything’ (8.30.80a) but they are also described, along with other such peoples, as fierce and cruel (8.51.18a), perhaps because they did not conform to the normal code of chivalry; at a later stage, however, their unorthodoxy is emphasised when Bhīṣma lists them among *kṣatriya jātis* which have fallen into untouchability through disregard of brāhmaṇs (13.33.19–21b and 35.17–18, cf. also 12.65.13–15). The excellence of the horses and the horsemanship of the Yavanas are among the most prominent of their characteristics: Bhagadatta comes with Yavanas to Yudhiṣṭhīra’s palace bringing a tribute of ‘speedy horses of good breed, as swift as the wind’ (2.47.12–13), the Yavanas have fine armour of damascened steel and brass (7.95.35ab) and are mailed (*damśitāḥ*, 7.95.43d), and they are mounted warriors (*sādināḥ*, 8.64.16c). References to foreign peoples as *goyonayas* clearly derive from a play on their name (occurring for example at 7.68.41–42 and 87.36–37).⁵⁶

The outcome of the quarrel between Vasiṣṭha and Viśvāmitra also deserves notice. Viśvāmitra’s hundred sons and the rest of his army are destroyed by these magically produced forces, so Viśvāmitra abdicates in favour of his one surviving son and goes off to perform austerities. Brahmā in due course grants him recognition as a *rājarshi* but this does not satisfy him and he sets about accumulating still

⁵⁵ The political power wielded by these foreign groups made it expedient to incorporate them into the structure of society somehow; the term ‘degenerate *kṣatriya*’, *vrātya-kṣatriya*, was used to indicate that they were originally *kṣatriyas* whose loss of status was due to non-performance of rituals or disregard of the brāhmaṇs (cf. *Manu* 10.43–45). Compare also the longer *Rāmāyaṇa* treatment of the Viśvāmitra episode (1.31–64), commented on in chapter 7.

⁵⁶ Other references to Yavanas occur for example at Mbh. 1.80.26b, 2.28.49b, 47.12c, 3.13.29b, 48.20d, 7.6.5d, 68.41c, 97.13d, 8.31.15d, 64.16c, 9.1.26d, 2.18b, 7.24d, 12.65.13a, (also Hv. 85.18b, Rām. 1.53.20d, 21b, 54.3a, 4.42.11a) and, as Yauna, 12.200.40c. The Yaunas, Kāmbojas, Gāndhāras, Kirātas and other barbarians are disparagingly referred to at 12.200.40–41; see further below.

greater ascetic powers; eventually, after he has challenged the gods by elevating Triśaiku bodily to heaven and threatening to create another Indra, he is granted the status of brāhmaṇa and has his ultimate ambition fulfilled when he is addressed as *brahmarṣi* by Vasiṣṭha. He has achieved the impossible, at least by later standards: as an individual he has changed his *varṇa* status.

The origin of the four *varṇas* is dealt with at several points in the *Śāntiparvan*. At 12.73.4–8, in answer to a question, the wind-god Vāyu declares that Īśvara created the four *varṇas* (as in the *Puruṣasūkta*) and assigned to the brāhmaṇas as their duty protection of *dharma*, to the *kṣatriyas* protection of the people, to the *vaiśyas* support of the <first> three *varṇas* by wealth, and to the *sūdras* service of the others (Vāyu then elaborates on these ideas in the next few verses, gradually shifting to the duties of a king). Within the *Bhṛgubharadvājasamvāda* (12.175–185), Bhṛgu first declares that Brahmā Prajāpati emitted all creation—the gods and other divine beings, brāhmaṇas, *kṣatriyas*, *vaiśyas*, *sūdras* and other sorts of men or beings—and assigns a colour to each *varṇa* (white, red, yellow and black respectively) but then, when Bharadvāja objects to this that there is an intermixture of colours (*varṇasamkara*, also ‘confusion of classes’) in all classes and variation of colour in many species, Bhṛgu moves on to give a more symbolic or psychological explanation of the four colours: originally Brahmā created just brāhmaṇas but those who were short-tempered and violent left their *varṇa*, turned red and became *kṣatriyas*, those who took to cattle-rearing and agriculture turned yellow and became *vaiśyas*, and those who in their delusion took to injury and untruth turned black and became *sūdras* (12.181.10–13, cf. also 12.60.38–40); those who diverged still further from the proper norms and did not recognise them became Piśācas, Rākṣasas, Pretas and various sorts of *mlecchas*.⁵⁷ Similarly, in another theistic adaptation of the *Puruṣasūkta*, Bhiṣma declares that Kṛṣṇa created a hundred individuals of each of the four named classes from the various parts of his body and placed Dhātṛ as their superintendent (12.200.31–33).

In a more elaborately worked out passage, the *Puruṣasūkta* model of the origin of the four castes is followed by a scheme for the origin of

⁵⁷ The irrelevance of skin colour to *varṇa* classification is also suggested by the fact that several of the main characters are said at one point or another to have a dark complexion—not just Kṛṣṇa (for whom there may well be particular reasons) but also Draupadī (also called Kṛṣṇā, ‘the dark woman’), Arjuna and Nakula.

what are usually termed the ‘mixed castes’ by both hypogamy and hypergamy, including Ambaṣṭhas, Ugras and Niṣādas (12.285.4–9, cf. *Manu* 10.8–23). As Horst Brinkhaus has convincingly shown,⁵⁸ this represents the second stage in the development of the theory of *varṇa-saṃkara*, ‘confusion of classes’. The first phase, when only the offspring of *pratiloma* unions are counted as ‘mixed castes’, is seen at 13.48.4–29 and 13.49.7–11,⁵⁹ whereas by the second stage, as in 12.285.4–9, some of the *anuloma* offspring are included. In addition, the *Śantiparvan* also includes, for example, a purely incidental mention of the four *varṇas* at 12.314.45c; thus, the frequency of mention is also striking.

The impossibility of changing one’s *varṇa* is underlined in the passage where Yudhiṣṭhīra asks whether a *kṣatriya*, *vaiśya* or *sūdra* can gain the status of a brāhmaṇa (13.28.2–3) and Bhīṣma’s reply is to narrate the story of Mataṅga (13.28.4–30.16). Mataṅga was brought up as a brāhmaṇa but one day his true status as a *cāṇḍala*,⁶⁰ because of his mother’s adultery with one, is betrayed by his conduct; he spends the rest of his life in austerities in a vain attempt to gain brāhmaṇhood and finally settles for the power to move at will in the sky. Thus, by the latest stages of the *Mahābhārata* the *varṇa* system has become completely rigid and the exclusivity is absolute. Nevertheless, although brāhmaṇs were granted enormous privileges and extravagantly praised (e.g. 12.73 and 13.34), they were not entirely above the law and a king is directed to execute his guru if he violates the rule of *dharma*. In other passages, though, they are regarded as above the law (12.56.31–33) or at most to be banished from the kingdom (12.78.14).

To return to the lists of peoples or tribes included in narrative portions, their heterogeneity is one of the most obvious features. For example the list at 1.165.35–37 contains not only the invading groups in the Northwest (the Pahlavas, Śakas and Yavanas) but also the Tamils of South India (Dramiḍas, given as Dramiḷas at 13.33.20a), Sinhalese and several tribal peoples (Śabaras, Kirāṭas and Daradas), as well as two general terms for foreigners: *mlecchas* and *barbaras*. Yet

⁵⁸ Brinkhaus 1978: 102–109 (especially 107–108). ‘Confusion of castes’ is also mentioned as a sign of disorder or anarchy at Mbh. 3.177.26–27, 6.23.41–43 (BhG. 1.41–43) and 12.49.61.

⁵⁹ On these two passages, see Brinkhaus 1978: 24–29 and 71–74. Brinkhaus also treats Mbh. 13.44.10–12 and 47.4+7 on pp. 52–54.

⁶⁰ The term *cāṇḍala*, with its overtones of strong contempt for untouchables, is not in fact very frequent in the epics; the main passages in which the term is used are at 12.139.41ff. and 13.48.28–33 (also Rām. 1.57–58).

the real point is that, though impure in various ways, these groups are acting in support of brāhmaṇa values—co-operation rather than exclusion is the rationale for their mention. This is in fact even clearer in some other similar lists, the purpose of which seems to be to include everyone as a participant in the action (and so also clearly secondary). When, as a preliminary to Yudhiṣṭhīra's celebration of the *rājasūya* ritual, the other Pāṇḍavas set out on the conquest of the world, Nakula is recorded as defeating among others the Śibis, Trigartas, Ambaṭhas and Mālavas, the Śūdras and Ābhīras, the Hārahūṇas and all the rulers of the west (2.29.6–11; cf. also Cīnas, Hūṇas and Śakas among those who bring tribute at 2.47.19a). To the *rājasūya* itself came not only *mlecchas* (2.31.10a), who as foreigners should have been totally excluded from such rituals, but also the Tamils and Sinhalese again and many individually named kings. Just before the start of the war, the narrator Saṃjaya recites to the blind Dhṛtarāṣṭra a list of all the participants on both sides (6.10.37–74), which includes Māhiṣakas (45b and 57c), Ābhīras (45d and 66a), Śūdras (46a and 66a), Pahlavas (46b), Śabarās (46c), Kirātas (49c, 55c and 67d), Śakas and Niṣādas (50a), Barbaras (55c), Tamils and Keralans (57a), *mlecchas* (63c), the *mleccha jātis* of the Yavanās and Kāmbojas (64ab), Hūṇas (64d) and Daradas (66a).⁶¹ Though clearly much expanded, these lists are linked to the main plot of the epic, unlike the various lists in the *Śānti* and *Anuśāsanaparvans*: a listing of all mankind at 12.65.13–14 (which places Yavanās, Kirātas, Gāndhāras, Cīnas, Śabarās, Barbaras, Śakas, Tuṣāras, Kahvas, Pahlavas, Andhras, Madrakas, Oḍras, Pulindas, Ramaṭhas, Kācas and *mlecchas* alongside brāhmaṇas, *kṣatriyas*, *vaiśyas* and *śūdras*), a list of first southern and then northern peoples at 12.200.38–41, and the two lists of lapsed *kṣatriyas* already mentioned (13.33.19–21 and 35.17–18).

Several of the groups in the earlier lists are later regarded as the results of ‘confusion of classes’ but here figure as independent cultural groups. Most strikingly of all, Śūdras and Ābhīras are mentioned together—obviously as tribal peoples—not only in the second list (6.10.66a) but also in other geographical passages (2.29.9a and 3.186.30d). The probably related name of the Kṣudrakas is similarly linked with the Mālavas at 2.48.14d, in a list of those peoples from

⁶¹ K. C. Mishra (1987: 66–216) utilises mainly these three passages (2.23–29, 2.45–48 and 6.10) to compile a list of 363 names of tribes; although several of these are questionable, the total does demonstrate how much these lists have been expanded.

different regions who brought tribute to the *rājasūya*, a list which also includes Ambaṣṭhas (14a, also 2.29.6c) and Kirātas (8d and 10a), here clearly seen as groups with some prestige, by contrast with their treatment in 12.285.4–9 above. The Kirātas are in fact mentioned a number of times in the older parts of the *Mahābhārata* as a group evidently respected for their martial prowess.⁶² In the same way the Māhiṣakas, originally participants in the action (6.10.45b, 57c, 8.30.45a), are later classed as ‘lapsed *ksatriyas*’ (13.33.20c) and are probably to be identified with the Māhiṣyas whom later legal texts classify as the offspring of a *ksatriya* man and a *vaiśya* woman.⁶³

The list of participants in the *Mahābhārata* war includes the Niṣādas (6.10.50a), and elsewhere their king Ekalavya is recorded as a noted opponent of Kṛṣṇa (5.47.71), while they are also named in the list of Sahadeva’s conquests (2.28.5a, 44c), just as Nakula’s conquests include the Utsavasamketa *gaṇas*, tribal groups (*grāmaneya*) along the Indus, the Śūdras and the Ābhīras (2.29.8–9). These examples suggest that the Niṣādas were accorded some respect in the earliest stages of the epic but before long they are a clearly despised group. Already in 3.130.4 the river Sarasvatī is said to disappear to avoid being seen by Niṣādas (at the place later famous as Vinaśana) and in the Śāntiparvan the sages churn the right thigh of the wicked king Vena’s corpse and produce the deformed and ugly Niṣāda, from whom originate the cruel Niṣādas and other *mlecchas* who live in the Vindhya (12.59.101–3); they are still an independent group but their status is low. Other groups, such as the Śabarās, seem at all stages to have been regarded as separate tribes or peoples and in such instances what changes is simply the esteem in which they are held, the earliest references suggesting their significance as potential foes and implicitly their rough equality with Āryan society and later references stressing what are seen as their cultural deviations and so relegating them to a low status. Broadly speaking, it is the same process that is visible with the Niṣādas, later seen as a despised occupational group of hunters as much as a tribal society, and with the Ambaṣṭhas and Māhiṣakas, later reduced to the status of ‘mixed castes’. Such groups were seen originally as outsiders, as culturally and probably racially

⁶² Other mentions include 1.165.36a, 2.4.21b, 22a (where their king Sumanas attends Yudhiṣṭhira’s court), 13.19a, 3.48.20d, 6.10.49c, 55c, 67d, 12.65.13a and 13.35.18a (where they are classed as ‘lapsed *ksatriyas*’). In the *Rāmāyaṇa* they are located in the eastern direction (4.39.26a) and also mentioned at 1.54.3d.

⁶³ Cf. *Yājñavalkyasmṛti* 1.91–94 and *Gautamadharmaśūtra* 4.18–21.

distinct, but it was their interaction, however limited, with Āryan society which interested the early poets of the epics—no doubt because it most interested their *kṣatriya* audience—and ideas of racial superiority seem absent.

Although the attendance of *mlecchas* at Yudhiṣṭhira's *rājasūya* is perhaps the most striking example of their participation in the action, it is noticeable that they are included in these various lists alongside other tribes or peoples who were regarded much less as outsiders and that the term is not uncommon.⁶⁴ The word tended to denote any non-Sanskrit-speaking outsider but it is interesting to note that internal distinctions, *mleccha jātis*, were recognised (6.10.64b and 14.91.25b), *mleccha* teachers are mentioned (*mlecchācāryāḥ*, 12.4.8c) and Yudhiṣṭhira asks why *mlecchas* also engage in fasting (13.109.1b), so they were not simply regarded as some undifferentiated ‘other’. Indeed, it is noticeable that many references are to them fighting on one side or the other in the great war (5.22.21c, 158.20d, 9.1.26c, 2.18a, 36c) or being conquered by one or other of the Pāṇḍava heroes (2.27.23c, 28.44b, 29.15b, 5.49.26b), while the extent of the Pāṇḍava dynasty's power is indicated by saying that it ruled over the four quarters of the world up to or including the *mlecchas* and the forest tribes (1.62.5). The extent of their presence is also indicated by the assertion that Āryans and *mlecchas* alike drink water from the various rivers of Bhāratavarṣa (6.10.12). The most intriguing reference is to Vidura speaking to Yudhiṣṭhira in Mleccha language (*mlecchavācā*, 1.135.6b) when he wants to keep something secret; if taken at face value, this suggests that political or economic considerations had encouraged them to learn the language, but here as elsewhere narrative considerations may well have been more important than didactic ones.

However, in the long run, the *mlecchas'* disregard for brāhmaṇical values led to their being despised, as seen in various later passages. Mārkaṇḍeya predicts that at the end of this degenerate age many *mleccha*, Yavana, Śaka, Śūdra and Ābhīra kings will rule (3.186.29–

⁶⁴ It occurs at 1.62.5a, 79.13d, 80.26d, 135.6b, 165.36c, 202.8d, 2.27.23c, 28.44b, 29.15b, 31.10a, 47.12b, 3.48.19c, 61.2d, 186.29a, 188.29a, 37a, 45a, 52a, 70a, 93d, 5.22.21c, 49.26b, 158.20d, 6.10.12c, 63c, 64b, 13.15b, 41.103a, 7.25.17b, 68.42a, 44e, 69.30d, 87.37c, 95.36b, 98.23b, 8.27.91c, 30.70ab, 80c, 51.19c, 9.1.26c, 2.18a, 36c, 12.4.8c, 59.103d, 65.14b, 162.28d, 181.18b 13.109.1b, 112.108b, 14.72.24c, 83.30b, 91.25b (and Rām. 1.54.3c, 2.3.9a and 4.42.10a, also *Harivāṇśa* 85.18c), whereas Barbara, perhaps deriving from the Greek βάρβαρος, is rather less common, occurring at 1.165.36b, 2.29.15c, 3.48.19c, 6.10.55c, 7.95.13b, 38d, 12.65.13b, 200.40d and 13.35.17d (and in the *Rāmāyaṇa* only as variant readings at 1.54.2d and 4.42.12b).

30) and the whole world will become *mleccha* (here clearly used in a pejorative sense, ‘barbarian’, 3.188.29, 37, 45, 52, 70), while Br̥haspati declares that evil-doers are reborn as *mlecchas* (13.112.108). The culmination of this trend is then seen in Mārkandeya’s prediction that Kalki Viṣṇuyaśas will arise and root out all the *mlecchas* (3.188.89–93), as well as in passages excluded from the text, when praise of Viṣṇu’s *avatāras* includes Kalkin who will destroy the *mlecchas* (12 App. 6.39–40 and App. 7.19–20).

More integral to the plot of the epics than the lists of participants in the warfare, from which many of the references so far have come, are the activities of the main characters themselves. In contrast to the condemnation of ‘confusion of castes’ in the didactic parts, there are significant characters participating in the action who are the offspring of mixed marriages or who marry wives who clearly are not of the same *varṇa*. The term *karaṇa* (later denoting the offspring of a *ksatriya* man and a *vaiśya* woman) is used incidentally and, it seems, purely factually of Yuyutsu, the son of Dhṛtarāṣṭra and a *vaiśya* woman (1.57.99d and 107.36d), who fought on the side of the Pāṇḍavas, and of Vidura, the wise adviser, who was fathered by Vyāsa on a slavegirl substituted for queen Ambikā (1.102.23 and 107.1) and is considered the brother of Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Pāṇḍu. Vidura in particular is accorded much respect by the other characters for his wisdom. Besides Draupadī, the five Pāṇḍava brothers also marry other wives, some of whom come from tribal peoples (1.90.83–87), and have liaisons with women from still more unusual backgrounds. Bhīma has a son Ghaṭotkaca by the Rākṣasī Hiḍimbā (Mbh. 1.139–143) and Arjuna has a son Irāvān by Ulūpī, the daughter of a Nāga king (1.206.8–34); in both instances the son is brought up by his mother but later fights on the side of the Pāṇḍavas in the great battle. This type of motif is not unusual in other heroic literatures and another example in the *Mahābhārata* is that Babhruvāhana, Arjuna’s son by Citrāṅgadā, daughter of king Citravāhana, becomes Citravāhana’s heir (1.207.14–23 and 209.23–24). In all of these we no doubt see *ksatriya* readiness to enter into any union which was politically desirable or which took the individual’s fancy, in contrast to the legalism of the brāhmans expressed in the elaborate classification of ‘mixed castes’ together with abhorrence of the unions held to produce them.

It was to the advantage of the *ksatriyas* as the rulers to make alliances and so to convert the potentially hostile ‘other’ into an ally. Their aim was not in the main to manufacture artificial divisions but even

if necessary to gloss over real ones. Perhaps the most extraordinary statement about the *mlecchas* and others in the *Mahābhārata* is contained in a genealogical part of the first book, where the story of Yayāti and his five sons is given. Incidentally, King Yayāti has two sons by his wife Devayānī, who is the daughter of the brāhmaṇa Śukra (thus strictly a *pratiloma* union), and three by her servant Śarmiṣṭhā, daughter of king Vṛṣaparvan. Within this passage the narrator tells Arjuna's great-grandson, Janamejaya: 'From Yadu were born the Yādavas, Turvasu's sons are the Yavanas, Druhyu's sons are the Bhojas, while Anu's are the *mleccha jātis*. From Pūru comes the Paurava dynasty in which you were born, o king' (1.80.26–27). So the foreigners are no longer completely unrelated.

There are various traces still in the narrative of archaic patterns of social organisation partly hidden under the generally more developed pattern. For instance, Kṛṣṇa declares that there are 18000 *vrātas* in the lineage, *kula*, to which he belongs (2.13.55ab), which is perhaps a reminiscence of the older *vrāta* organisation, of which another aspect is seen in the Vedic *Vrātyas*. More centrally to the main story there is the humiliation that Draupadī suffers in being brought into the *sabhā* where, as she pointedly remarks, they do not bring respectable women (*dharmaṁ striyah*, 2.62.99a). The implication of this, as Vassilkov has suggested, is that other sorts of women were and he compares the institution of the 'men's houses' and in particular the *ghotul* of the Muria as described by Verrier Elwin, adducing also the evidence of the *kuntāpa* hymns of the *Atharvaveda* and the presence in Indra's heavenly *sabhā* of the Gandharvas and Apsarases.⁶⁵ The *gaṇas* as the group of young warriors—the term is mainly used in the Vedas for the Maruts—would then be balanced by the *gaṇikās* as the young women attached to the men's house during this period of transition from childhood to full membership of adult society. This helps to explain both the later meaning of the term *gaṇikā* as a prostitute and their prominent role in public festivals, still attested in the epics. Even in the case of such a central feature of developed Hindu society as the *āśrama* system, traces of an older pattern are preserved as late as the *Śāntiparvan*.

Although there are references to the four *āśramas* by name at various

⁶⁵ Vas[s]ilkov 1989–90.

points throughout the epic, apart from those in the *Sāntiparvan* they do not usually go into details. One partial exception is when Aṣṭaka asks how the householder, the mendicant (*bhikṣu*), the student and the forest dweller (*vānaprastha*) behave and Yayāti answers in terms of the *brahmacārin* studying and serving his teacher, the *ghastha* sacrificing with lawfully acquired wealth, making gifts and feeding guests, the *muni* living in the forest and being restrained in his food and his activity, and the *bhikṣu* being always homeless, mastering his senses and becoming free of all ties (1.86.1–5); the difference in the names and in their order is striking and was already noted by Ludwik Skurzak.⁶⁶

Within the *Bhṛgubharadvājasamvāda* (12.175–185), there is an interesting passage on the four *āśramas*: Bharadvāja asks Bhṛgu to teach him the practices specific to each of the four *āśramas* (12.184.7) and Bhṛgu's ensuing discourse on the *āśramas* is in the prose *sūtra* style. The prose passage is quite incongruous here, occurring as it does in the middle of a long dialogue in verse, but it is especially significant because it is, in the opinion of Patrick Olivelle, a remnant of an old *dharmaśāstra*.⁶⁷ It describes the duties of the four *āśramas*, though without addressing the question of when and how one enters them, and each description ends with the rewards which a person who performs its duties attains after death, strongly implying the older pattern in which the *āśramas* were regarded as permanent states rather than a series of stages. This is quite explicit in another passage from the *Śukānupraśna*, where Vyāsa begins his discourse on the duties of a brāhmaṇa by declaring that, after his return from studentship, he should follow one of the four *āśramas* according to rule until his release from his body (12.226.4), but he then continues by praising the householder as the root of all four and declaring that after he has paid his three debts he proceeds to the other *āśramas* (12.226.6–7); later in the same section, there are four *adhyāyas*, 12.234–7, which describe in detail the classical system of the *āśramas*. Though less clearcut, another instance where probably the four are seen as alternatives occurs in the *Kapilagosamvāda*, where Kapila declares that the duties of those following different *āśramas* have the same aim and calls them four eternal paths leading to the gods (12.260.12–14).

⁶⁶ Skurzak 1958.

⁶⁷ Olivelle 1993: 154. The fact that this is probably a remnant of an early *sūtra* was already noted by Paul Deussen in 1909.

However, the most interesting passage comes within the *Śukacarita* (12.310–320), where Śuka seeks instruction from Janaka of Videha, who first propounds the view that one should follow the four *āśramas* successively but then, when Śuka queries whether this is necessary for one who has already gained the knowledge needed for liberation, puts forward the option view and acknowledges that the succession of the *āśramas* is merely for the maintenance of society (12.313).

Irawati Karve has collected and analysed from an anthropological perspective the kinship terms found in the first five books.⁶⁸ Terms are found for great-grandfather (*prapitāmaha* 1.32.17b, 40.7d—perhaps in a classificatory manner for brother of great-grandfather—54.15b, 3.79.1b, 5.84.3d, also for example 12.160.6d), grandfather (*pitāmaha*, *mātāmaha*, also *mātus pitā*, *mātur janaka*, *mātus śārīrakartā* at 5.174.17b, 20d, 24c, 175.28c), father (*pitr*, *tāta*, *janitr*, *janayitr*, *janaka*), brother (*bhrātr*, *sodara*, *sahodara*), son (*putra*, *putraka*, *suta*, *ātmaja*, *tanaya*, *sūnu*, *nandana*, *dāyāda*, *dāraka*, *kumāra*, of which *putra* and *suta* ‘are used most’), grandson (separate terms for son’s son, *pautra*, *napitr*, *putraja*, and daughter’s son, *dauhitriya* 5.175.15a, *dauhitra* 5.101.23d), great-grandson, mother (*mātr*, *ambā*, *jananī*, *janitrī*, *chātrī*), sister (*svasr*, *bhagini* and as adj. only *sodaryā*), daughter (*duhitr*, *sutā*, *tanayā*, *ātmajā*, *kanyā*, *kanyakā*, *putrī*, *putrikā*, *kumārn*, *tanujā*, *nandinī*), grand-daughter (daughter’s daughter, *dauhitrī*), mother’s brother (*mātula*—on the other hand the term for father’s brother, *pitrava*, is rare and probably late), father’s sister (*pitrsvasī* or *pitus svasā*) and mother’s sister (*mātṛsvasā* or *mātur bhagini*). For relations by marriage there are terms for husband (*pati*, *bhartr*, *nātha*, *vara*), wife (*bhāryā*, *patnī*, *dharma-patnī*, *jāyā*, *dāra*, *kalatra*, also infrequently *sahadharmaṇī*, *sahadharma-carī*, *gārha-thabha-hāgīnī*, *kāminī*, *kāntā*, *priyavāsas*, *priyā*; *vadhū* found only twice at 3.248.17 and 253.9), co-wife (*sapatnī*), husband’s brother (*devr*), wife’s brother (*syāla*, 4.17.7d), husband’s father, wife’s father, husband’s mother, son’s wife (*vadhū*, *snuṣā*) and daughter’s husband. Besides these there are terms which denote relatives generally (*guru*, *bandhu*, *bāndhava*, *jñāti*, *sambandhin*, *janya*, *āpta*) or the household (*kuṭumba*, *kula*, *gotra*, *vamśa*, *anvaya*, *anvavāya*), the concepts of relationship through father and relationship through marriage. Karve points out that this is a system in which male relations are recognised more fully than female relations and many terms are used in a classificatory manner. She also notes instances where variants on the narrative in the

⁶⁸ Karve 1943–44.

Southern recension have introduced, for example, instances of cross-cousin marriage.

The normal pattern of inheritance was clearly by primogeniture but it is in keeping with the tendency of the *Mahābhārata* to call into question fundamental values that there are major exceptions within the narrative, where Bhīṣma and Dhṛtarāṣṭra are both excluded for different reasons and at an earlier period Yayāti's youngest son Pūru succeeds him for a different reason again (1.80). The relatively frequent use of metronymics is no doubt due to the frequency of polygamy, with for example the Pāṇḍavas also called the Kaunteyas and Mādreyas.

Although the earliest study of women in the *Mahābhārata* appeared as early as the middle of the 19th century,⁶⁹ the position of women has remained a comparatively neglected aspect of epic studies. Part of the problem is that the behaviour of some of the principal female characters, and especially Draupadī, is obviously not typical, while other women are too peripheral for anything significant to be narrated about them.⁷⁰ It is doubtful, for example, whether much can be learnt about current practice from Draupadī's questions about Yudhiṣṭhīra's status when he staked her.⁷¹ So too the centrality of the practice of *niyoga* to the story of the epic, with Vyāsa fathering Dhṛtarāṣṭra, Pāṇḍu and Vidura on Vicitravīrya's widows (1.90.55–60), is not good evidence for the general prevalence of the practice, any more than that brāhmaṇas beget sons from the wives of the *ksatriyas* massacred by Rāma Jāmadagnya (1.58.1–9, cf. 1.98.1–5). On the other hand, incidental references as well as minor components of the plot indicate that the practice of women burning themselves on their husband's pyre was regarded as normal. Herman Lommel, in the context of the legend of Satyavān and Sāvitrī, has looked at the practice and argues that it can only be found in younger, interpolated parts of the epics and not in any older literature; his conclusion is that it is a non-Aryan practice.⁷² It is doubtful whether the evidence altogether

⁶⁹ Félix Nèye (1858).

⁷⁰ A somewhat romanticised picture of the main female characters in the epic is given by Kalyanov (1977–78). A more realistic assessment of Draupadī can be found in Sally J. Sutherland (1989).

⁷¹ Nevertheless Krishna Caitanya suggests (1985: 181): 'Draupadi, rallying after the shock Bhishma's words must have given her, points out that when, after Yudhishtira had staked himself into slavery, Sakuni pointedly asked him to stake her, there was tacit recognition that the wife was not automatically enslaved when her husband became a slave.'

⁷² Lommel 1955–58.

bears this out. For example, although there is no hint of it at Śamtanu's death (1.95), Mādrī immolates herself on Pāṇḍu's funeral pyre and is envied by Kuntī, who remains behind to care for their sons (1.116), while a little earlier in the narrative Kuntī herself tells the story of king Vyusitāśva's wife, Bhadrā Kākṣīvatī, who declares that her life without her husband is valueless but nevertheless is persuaded to live by a promise that she will bear sons by her husband's corpse (1.112). Kīcaka's relatives try forcibly to cremate the disguised Draupadī along with him (4.22) but this may not be particularly early. Certainly, the passage in the *Āśramavāsikaparvan* where Vyāsa encourages the wives of the dead warriors to drown themselves in the Gaṅgā is very late (but this is also not the standard *satī* pattern, since this event occurs years after their husbands' deaths). At the destruction of the Vṛṣnis, four of Vasudeva's wives, Devakī, Bhadrā, Rohinī and Madirā, prepare to mount his pyre and die with him (16.8.18+24) but Akrūra's wives go forth as wanderers (16.8.70), and similarly Rukmiṇī and other named wives enter fire but Satyabhāmā and others enter the forest (16.8.71–72). This pattern, of the practice as one freely chosen by the individual, is indeed the usual epic one, so far as that can be identified.

As some of these references indicate, the poets of the *Mahābhārata* do envisage women becoming hermits or ascetics, although the number of instances narrated in any detail is small and not all women to be found in āśramas are ascetics, as the well known example of Śakuntalā clearly shows. There are two in the *Gālavacarita* in the *Udyogaparvan*: at one point Gālava meets Śāṇḍilī, a brāhmaṇ woman who is engaged in austerities on Mount Rṣabha, where she lives alone (5.111) and Yayāti's daughter, Mādhavī, after bearing sons to three different kings in order to gain the horses Gālava needs (having been, in Shalini Shah's words, 'alienated from the male order world where from a person she became only a *womb on rent*'),⁷³ rejects Yayāti's attempt to arrange her *swayamvara* and instead opts for the forest life, living on herbs and water and practising celibacy (5.118.5–11). Balarāma in

⁷³ Shah 1995: 29–30. Shah continues: 'The object of men's exchange had finally acquired subjectivity and in the process repudiated the male world. However, Mādhavī's service role did not end with this renunciation. In the *Udyoga Parvan* we find that she tries to save Yayāti, her fallen (from heaven) father, by giving him half of her merit, acquired through the performance of severe austerities.' The latter incident is found at 5.119.24–25.

his pilgrimage tour visits the hermitage of a brāhmaṇa woman *siddhā*, who preferred forest life to an unwanted marriage and has gained her present status through vows of celibacy, yoga and asceticism but even so is told by Nārada that since she is unmarried and without the *samskāras*, *asamkrta kanyā*, she cannot win heaven and so does marry and promptly goes to heaven (9.51); from the reference here to Gālava and a little further on to the daughter of Śāṇḍilya (9.53.6–7) this seems to be related to the previous episode. The most significant episode is that in the *Śāntiparvan* where Sulabhā, a female teacher of Sāṃkhya, challenges Janaka and uses her powers to enter his mind and test his claims to detachment (12.308); she is termed a *bhikṣukī*, established in *yogadharma* and she wanders the earth alone (12.308.7); the main aim of the passage is to show the irrelevance of gender distinctions to *nivṛtti* and so is most appropriately presented through this independent woman. On the other hand, three passages in the *Anuśāsanaparvan* present a more traditional view, where women are necessarily linked with sexuality, marriage or procreation, even if credited with spiritual achievements: in one Bhīṣma adduces the example of Gautamī, who is described as firm in tranquillity (*śama-samyutā*, 13.1.10b) even when faced with the death of her son but, despite that description, is clearly not envisaged as an ascetic; in the second Aṣṭavakra, while seeking a wife, meets an old woman who invites him to have sexual intercourse with her, saying that he need not fear a breach of *dharma* since she is independent (*svatantrāsmi*, 13.21.11c); in the third instance Śāṇḍilī (whose name links back to the figure in the Gālava story) declares that she has reached divine status not by ascetic practices but by faithful service to her husband and her parents-in-law in all circumstances (13.124).

Marriage is certainly seen as the normal state for all women and it is a woman's duty to serve her husband faithfully, as various episodes are obviously designed to illustrate, such as those of Damayantī, Sāvitrī and Sukanyā. The emphasis on absolute fidelity by the wife is illustrated in hyperbolic fashion by the relatively late story of Reṇukā whom Jamadagni orders his sons successively to behead for a minor peccadillo (3.116.5–18), whereas in the narrative itself both Satvayatī and Kuntī have sons before marriage. So too, Nala can declare in proverbial fashion that women's nature is fickle in this world (*strīsvabhāvaś calo loke*, 3.69.6a) in the very sentence in which he acknowledges the harm that he has done to Damayantī. On the other hand, as that story shows, women were not particularly secluded even after

marriage and other examples can be cited from the *Ādiparvan*, such as all the townspeople, *ksatriyas* and *vaiśyas* coming out of Hāstinapura with their wives to greet the ascetics returning with Pāṇḍu's body (1.117.8–16), the party that Kuntī gives that is attended by brāhmaṇas and their wives, at which all eat and drink and make merry (1.136.5–6), the festival celebrated by the Andhakas and Vṛṣnis and attended by all the townspeople and their wives (1.211), or the excursion to the Yamunā organised by Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna, where the women become quite drunk (1.214.14–25). Again, though in sorrow not in celebration, in the *Strīparvan* the women go to the battlefield after the war is over to mourn their dead. Draupadī's claim, as she is dragged into the *sabhā*, that neither wind nor sun have seen her before in her house (2.62.5) must be considered hyperbole.

Although polygyny is quite frequently alluded to purely incidentally in the narrative (and elaborate rules are laid down in the *Sānti* and *Anuśāsanaparvan*), the sole instance of polyandry is the quite exceptional one of Draupadī marrying the five Pāṇḍavas and the reactions to this indicate just how anomalous it was felt to be.⁷⁴ Duḥṣanta in his wooing of Śakuntalā enumerates the eight types of marriage (1.67.8–14), as does Bhīṣma when he abducts the king of Kāśī's daughters on behalf of Vicitravīrya (1.96.7–12). Within the narrative the *svayamvara*—literally ‘self-choice’ but in reality more of a contest for the woman’s hand among several suitors—is the most favoured by its *ksatriya* heroes, as the instances of Kuntī and Draupadī, Sāvitrī and Damayantī show and as Kṛṣṇa declares to Arjuna, before nonetheless advising him to abduct Subhadrā as being more certain in its outcome (1.211.21–23).⁷⁵ Evidence from the narrative suggests that marriage did not normally take place till after puberty; after all, both Kuntī and Satyavatī have had sons before their marriages to Pāṇḍu and Śamtanu respectively, and Draupadī’s beauty at her *svayamvara* is described in terms that suggest that she was fully adult, while Ambā’s reaction to her capture by Bhīṣma and consequent rejection by Śalya suggests the same. On the other hand, the *Anuśāsanaparvan* makes it the duty of a father to get his daughter married on pain of incurring

⁷⁴ The explanation put forward by Caitanya (1985: 146) is altogether too facile: ‘In his literary manoeuvring, Vyasa would have been handicapped if he had to fill up the narration with enough episodes to give sufficient individuation to five consorts for the five Pandavas. And he was quite capable of startlingly breezy resolutions of this type for the problem.’

⁷⁵ However, Bhīṣma in the *Anuśāsanaparvan* suggests that there are divided views about Sāvitrī’s *svayamvara* (13.45.5).

the guilt of brahmanicide (13.25.9) and again declares that girls should preferably be married before puberty (13.44.13–15, cf. 3.277.35) as part of the extensive teaching on the nature, status and function of women put into the mouth of Bhīṣma (13.38–47), prefaced by Yudhiṣṭhīra's remark that women are the root of all faults (13.38.1). Women, according to this, are always prone to infidelity, so men should always take precautions to protect their honour. A story of how they were created by Brahmā is narrated to explain their nature, leading into the story of Vipula (13.40–43). The five forms of marriage are then described (13.44.3–8: those appropriate to brāhmaṇas and *kṣatriyas*, Gāndharva, Āsura and Rākṣasa, a simpler list than the eight forms of marriage at *Manu* 3.20–34), and issues relating to dowry are discussed, while the practice of selling a daughter to a suitor is condemned (*śulka*, cf. 13.4.10–11) and the practice of *niyoga* is permitted for a widow whose marriage was not consummated (13.44). The status of women in society and their inheritance rights are then laid down (13.45 and again in 47); interestingly, a daughter's share is declared to be the same as a son's and a man without a son may make his daughter his heir (an example of this in the narrative is the condition that Citrāṅgadā's son by Arjuna should succeed his grandfather, Citravāhana, at 1.207.14–23). Rules for how a wife should be treated in the home of her husband's family are given, with instructions that she is to be honoured, treated kindly and pleased with gifts (13.46.1–10, cf. Vidura's advice at 5.38.11), but equally it is emphasised that women should always be under the care of a male and should never be independent (13.46.13—a proverbial statement found also at 13.21.19 and *Manu* 9.3—cf. 12.144.7), to the extent that elsewhere abduction of another man's wife and stealing his property attract the same penance (12.36.22).

The practice of *niyoga* discussed by Bhīṣma and attested in the epic narrative is regularly described by the metaphor of the wife as the field, *kṣetra*.⁷⁶ The view that the son so produced belongs to the husband is clearly enunciated for the *kṣatriya* women who bear children by brāhmaṇas, after Rāma Jāmadagnya's extermination of the male *kṣatriyas*, when Bhīṣma ascribes to the Vedas the statement 'The son belongs to him who took the hand <in marriage>' (1.98.5, cf. 1.58.4–9); he continues with the example of the blind sage Dīrgatamas who fathers sons for Balin on his wife Sudeṣṇā, who first

⁷⁶ Cf. Gail Hinich Sutherland (1990).

however sends her nurse instead (1.98.23–33). These are both preliminaries, of course, to his suggesting that a brāhmaṇa should be invited to father children on Vicitravīrya's 'fields' (1.99.1) and Satyavatī nominating her son Vyāsa, who fathers Dhṛitarāṣṭra, Pāṇḍu and Vidura on Vicitravīrya's widows (1.99.2–100.30, cf. 1.90.55–60). Normally the practice was only resorted to when the husband died before producing a son but in the next generation Pāṇḍu urges Kuntī to resort to it and cites the example of Śāradāñdāyinī (1.111.21–36), which Kuntī counters by the example of Bhadrā who was able to conceive by the corpse of her dead husband Vyusitāśva (1.112.7–34), just as when Pāṇḍu wants her to use her boon to produce a fourth son she remonstrates that even in times of distress this is not allowed, for after four the woman becomes a loose woman and after five a harlot (*cārīnī* and *bandhakī*, 1.116.65). These instances are all ad hoc, but the *Sāntiparvan* alludes in a comparison to a widow taking her husband's brother, *devṛ*, as husband (12.73.12ab) and this practice underlies part of Śiśupāla's taunts about Bhīṣma's celibacy (2.38.23–24).

The remarriage of widows is also attested in various episodes, just as it is condemned in other passages, and in an ideal world no women would be widowed (1.102.10f). Arjuna marries Ulūpī when she is widowed and has a son Irāvān by her (6.86.6–9), although elsewhere Arjuna's oaths to Yudhiṣṭhira include those who marry a woman previously pledged (*bhaktapūrvām striyam*, 7.51.27a) among those who go to hell. Somewhat similarly Damayantī, after Nala's disappearance, arranges for Rātuparṇa to learn that she wants another husband and is planning a *svayamvara* in order to bring him and also the disguised Nala to her (3.68). The didactic portions generally condemn the practice and one particularly late passage asserts that what is given to a brāhmaṇa who is the son of a remarried widow (*paunarbhavē dvijē*) is like an oblation made into ashes (13.409* 8, cf. *Manu* 3.181). On the other hand the brāhmaṇa's wife in Ekacakrā depicts what must have been a common pattern when she voices her feelings about the prospect of widowhood, asking how she will be able to look after her children and still remain virtuous, since men run after widows like birds running after scraps thrown on the ground (1.146.10–12). She goes on to say that it is better for women to die before their husbands (1.146.22), just as Bhadrā, mentioned above, declares that a widow is better off dead, since her situation must be due to sins in a previous life, and that she will from then on lie on a bed of *kusa* grass (1.112.19–

27). The late books are already familiar with widows wearing white and leaving their hair unparted (15.32.15) and having no ornaments (16.8.17), and so being a pattern of desolation (e.g. 16.6.4). In these circumstances it is only natural that the custom of a woman becoming *sati* by following her husband in death, *sahamarana*, was as favoured as the evidence given above suggests and can even be praised by Śakuntalā in her grief at her rejection by Duḥṣanta (1.68.45).

As the example of Draupadī dragged before the Kuru assembly shows, a menstruating woman, *rajasvalā*, is impure and should not be seen in public. The share of Indra's brahmanicide that is distributed to women (5.13.17) is commonly linked to their menstrual impurity. This is made much more explicit in the didactic parts, where all ordinary contact with a menstruating woman is forbidden, even speaking with her (13.107.22), food prepared by a *rajasvalā* is not to be eaten (13.107.82 and 13.24.4), sexual intercourse with a menstruating woman is forbidden (12.159.24 and 13.107.142), and she must not come near the ancestral offering (13.92.15, cf. App. 14.299–303). However, after menstruation a woman becomes pure like a utensil cleaned with ash (12.36.27, cf. 1.673* 2–3). It is also seen as a duty for a woman's monthly fertility to be used, although references to this are not from the oldest parts of the text. Examples are the approach made on behalf of his teacher's wife to Utanika when her period is over but her husband is away (1.3.88–90), Śarmiṣṭha's similar proposition to Yayāti (1.77.7–13), and Vasu Uparicara's words when he spills his semen while thinking of his wife Girikā as he is out hunting that his wife's season must not remain barren (1.57.40); it is put most fully in Aśvapati's words to his daughter Sāvitrī when she reaches puberty that the father who does not give a woman away and the husband who does not cohabit are both reprehensible (3.277.35ab). On the other hand, the occasional references to an original situation of sexual promiscuity are clearly intended as means of persuasion rather than as fact. This is obviously the case with Pāṇḍu's words to Kuntī about the olden days when women enjoyed sex with anyone and how Śvetaketu changed that (1.113) and with Sūrya's arguments as he seduces Kuntī (3.291). Otherwise, sexual promiscuity is something attributed to the women of remote communities, such as the Uttara Kurus whom Pāṇḍu also cites (1.113.7), the women in the city of Māhiṣmatī (2.28.23–24), the Madrakas (8.27.75–76), or the Vāhlīkas condemned by Karṇa (8.30.16–30), and the result of their behaviour is that they turn into Rākṣasīs (9.42.18);

the libidinousness attributed to Rāksasīs is well illustrated by the character of Śūrpaṇakhā in the *Ramāyaṇa* and in the *Mahābhārata* by that of Hiḍimbā who propositions Bhīma, makes love to him by day only, and then brings up their son Ghaṭotkaca by herself (1.139–143). The tale of Oghavatī, who is told by her husband Sudarśana to offer a guest every form of hospitality and is then tested by Mṛtyu in disguise demanding the gift of herself, is clearly not a comment on sexual morals so much as a hyperbolic assertion of the efficacy of *atithidharma*, hospitableness, to overcome death, *mṛtyu* (13.2).

The instances of Citrāngadā and Hiḍimbā are sometimes cited as evidence for matriarchy but point at most to a form of matrilineal descent and more probably to alternative methods of securing a male heir.⁷⁷ The prominence of the maternal uncle, *mātula*, among the terms for relatives probably owes more to the significance within the narrative of Śakuni, maternal uncle of the Kauravas, and Kṛṣṇa, maternal uncle of Abhimanyu and of the Draupadeyas, than to his importance in a matrilineal system; as Karve's evidence already cited shows, in general male relations are more fully recognised than female relatives. Equally, the story of Hiḍimbā bearing Ghaṭotkaca and similar ones like that of Jaratkāru marrying his namesake, the sister of the Nāga king Vāsuki, and their son being brought up as a Nāga (1.42–44) reflect universal folktale elements rather than any real social pattern, even among non-Āryan groups. The much more usual pattern, stressed in much of Bhīṣma's teaching in the *Anuśāsanaparvan*, is that of the wife being given away by her father and passing into the custody of her husband's family. There is no decisive evidence for the exposure of female babies; the few possible examples in the narrative, such as Śakuntalā and Pramadvarā, are balanced by examples such as Gaṅgā's drowning of her seven sons by Śamtanu and Karṇa's abandonment by Kuntī, since in all of these other factors are involved. On the other hand, the preference for sons is revealed in such examples as Kuntī's blessing of Draupadī that she should be the mother of sons (1.191.7+12) and Drupada bringing up his daughter, the future Śikhaṇḍin, as a son and performing the *samskāras* appropriate to a son (5.189).

As the above evidence shows, although the pattern is not uniformly consistent, the position of women in the *Mahābhārata* tends to deteriorate over time. A degree of freedom implied by various incidents

⁷⁷ Cf. Shalini Shah (1995: 16–19), who questions their validity.

of the main narrative gradually gives way to an increasing emphasis on a woman's subordination to her husband, or failing him to some other male. The evidence for the practice of *niyoga* seems somewhat earlier on the whole than that for *sahamarana*, but the two practices no doubt existed alongside each other for a considerable period, as well as that of re-marriage of widows, which is relatively little attested (but this probably reflects the standards of the poets and their audience, since there is evidence that it has always been commoner among the lower castes). The patriarchal nature of epic society is abundantly clear.

Meat-eating is a natural concomitant of the pastoralism and hunting typical of the oldest levels of the epic, although by the time of the didactic portions there is a tendency to condemn it. For example, the Pāṇḍavas regularly hunted game to feed themselves and the brāhmaṇas dwelling in the Kāmyaka forest (3.47.1–12) and in the story of Kalmāṣapāda meat was clearly regarded as a normal part of a brāhmaṇa's diet (1.166.20), although a certain ambivalence is suggested by the rest of the story about the king's cannibalism. Draupadī offers Jayadratha and his companions a meal of fifty deer and promises that Yudhiṣṭhīra will provide them with black antelope, spotted antelope, venison, fawn, śarabha, rabbit, r̥yā, *nuru*, śambara, gayal, many deer, boar, buffalo and every other kind of game—even without the last phrase, a comprehensive list of animals hunted for food (3.251.12–13). On the other hand, at other points meat-eating is something practised only by the lowest echelons of society (e.g. 1.79.12). The *Anuśāsanaparvan* displays a distinctly ambivalent attitude: Nārada declares that under the constellation Rohiṇī one should give meat, rice, ghee and milk to brāhmaṇas (13.63.6) and Bhīṣma enumerates the foods to be offered to the *pitr̄s* at a śrāddha in ascending order of effectiveness as sesame, rice, barley, beans, water, roots and fruits, fish, mutton, rabbit, goat, boar, fowl, venison (*pāṛṣata*, *raurava*), gayal, buffalo, beef, *pāyasa*, *vādhrīnasa*, rhinoceros (*khadga*), basil and red-skinned goat (13.88.2–10, cf. *Manu* 3.266–272); on the other hand, Bhīṣma gives a long discourse praising *ahimsā* and condemning the eating of meat, quoting various authorities in support of his view that meat-eating is a great sin and listing several kings who attained *svarga* by avoiding it, before mentioning the circumstances under which meat may be eaten—when the animal has been slaughtered as part of a Vedic sacrifice (13.115–117). This passage has been commented on and

in part translated by Christopher Key Chapple, who also notes that the teaching ascribed to the god Bṛhaspati in the preceding *adhyāya* (13.114), which extols the six gates of *dharma* beginning with *ahimsā*, emphasises the adoption of a philosophical approach which sees all creatures as not different from oneself.⁷⁸ Chapple also suggests that the story of the encounter between a brāhmaṇ ascetic Jājali and the merchant Tulādhāra, which proclaims *ahimsā* as the highest morality (12.253–7), is theologically inspired by Jainism, on the basis of Tulādhāra's critique of farming and his insistence on the abandoning of animal sacrifice; this episode has been most fully examined by Proudfoot, who has emphasised how the passage has grown from the equivalent of about a single *adhyāya* to the present five under the influence of three trends of thought: a movement away from abnegative detachment to concern with benevolent *ahimsā*, a growth in prominence of the cow as the object of *ahimsā*, and sacrifice becoming the pervading interest.⁷⁹

Jagdish Narain Tiwari has examined funeral practices in the *Mahābhārata* and shown that cremation was the commonest method of disposal of the dead, but he also discusses the one reference to disposal of corpses in trees and collects instances which seem to indicate that exposure of a dead body was also practised.⁸⁰ Some of the more important and detailed descriptions are those of the cremation of Pāndu (1.116–118), the mass cremation of the slain warriors (11.26), Bhīṣma's funeral (13.154) and that of Kṛṣṇa (16.8.19–31); these are all funerals of *kṣatriyas* but the description of Drona's is broadly similar, except that his pyre was lit by *jaṭila brahmacārins* (11.23.37–42). The body was first prepared by formally dressing and anointing it, draping and decorating it with a silk garment and garlands, carrying it on a bier (*sibikā, yāna*) accompanied by the relatives, including the women, to the site in a wood by a river bank. Here the pyre itself was built with various woods, especially scented woods, the body was placed on it and the pyre set alight, while ghee and other libations were poured onto it. The fire to light the pyre was brought from the city in the procession and was no doubt, as laid down in the ritual texts, the fire ritually established in his lifetime by the dead man.

⁷⁸ Chapple 1996. His article includes translations of 13.114–116 (114 is incorrectly given as 113).

⁷⁹ Proudfoot 1987.

⁸⁰ Tiwari 1979.

The actual cremation was accompanied both by wailing from the mourners and by the chanting of Vedic *mantras*. The purificatory bath and water offering followed immediately and then there were twelve days of impurity, when everyone slept on the ground (1.118.29–30 for Pāṇdu's funeral). After this again came the *śrāddha* rituals, consisting mainly in the epic descriptions of making gifts of food, clothing and jewels. There is no clear reference to the ritual of collecting the bones, *asthisamcayana*, that is described in various ritual texts, unless for the remains of Dhṛtarāṣṭra, Gāndhārī and Kuntī after they have perished in the forest fire (15.47.14–23), but the *Anuśāsanaparvan* does praise the merits of consigning the bones of the dead to the Gangā (13.27.27–31).

The most unusual episode is that in the *Virāṭaparvan* where the Pāṇḍavas are about to enter Virāṭanagara to begin their year incognito (*ajñātavāsa*) and hide their weapons to complete their disguise (4.5) by making a bundle of their bows, arrows and so forth and depositing them in the hollow of a big *śamī* tree near the cremation ground on the outskirts of the city (4.5.12–14, 25–6). They tie a dead body to the tree to keep people away by its smell and also spread a rumour, especially among the herdsmen nearby, that it is the body of their 180-year-old mother placed there in accordance with the practice of their ancestors (4.5.27–29). At the end of the year, Arjuna has to bring prince Uttara to the tree to retrieve his weapons before fighting the attacking Kaurava army (4.37.1 and 38.1–13) and Uttara is indeed suitably squeamish. Tiwari believes that this contains a suggestion of tree-burial, citing the reference to *kuladharma* and *pūrvācāra* in support, and argues that, even if not generally practised in the locality, tree-burial was known of as a possibility.⁸¹ This seems to be basing too much on what is clearly an exceptional incident, explicable for narrative reasons.

Vidura in the *Viduragītā* declares to Yudhiṣṭhira that when people die others enjoy their wealth, just as birds or fire consume their dead bodies (5.40.15). Overall the passage clearly envisages cremation but

⁸¹ Tiwari 1979: 29–30: ‘The statement that the Pāṇḍavas started a rumour to explain the dead body tied to the tree may indicate that this sight was unusual and tree-burial was not generally practised in the locality. At the same time, it seems also clear that the credibility of the rumour does not simply depend on the authority of the label “*kula-dharma*” deliberately attached to it, but also on the distinct probability of that specific *kula-dharma*. In other words, even if tree-burial was not generally practised in that locality, it must have been known there that there were some people who actually practised it.’

here the wording seems to distinguish between two different modes of disposal and to include exposure. In the *Anuśasanaparvan* Bhīṣma cites an old story of a jackal and a monkey in which two acquaintances in a previous life are reborn as these animals for not giving certain things to a brāhmaṇa or for stealing fruit from a tree owned by a brāhmaṇa; the form of their conversation suggests either exposure or some delay at least before burning of the body at the śmaśāna (13.9, cf. 13.112.3–13). Elsewhere Samjaya says about the Uttara Kurus that there certain birds with sharp beaks and great strength take away or steal dead bodies and drop them on the mountains or in mountain caves (6.8.11); although the Uttara Kurus' territory is normally a purely mythical land, its location beside and to the north of Mt Meru mean that there is just a possibility that this is a vague recollection of the Iranian tradition of exposure of the dead.⁸²

The prohibition of cremation for children and ascetics is broadly confirmed by the epic evidence; for example, the *Śāntiparvan* has a story about the death of a male brāhmaṇa child, in which a vulture and a jackal try to speed and delay the departure of the relatives respectively, so that each can feast on the corpse at his normal feeding time (12.149) and Yudhiṣṭhīra when preparing to cremate Vidura's corpse hears a heavenly voice forbidding it because Vidura was a follower of *yati-dharma*, although it is not said what was done with the body (15.33.30–32). The practice of mass cremation for the ordinary war dead (11.26, cf. 12.99.43–44 and 4.23.6–7), though clearly present in the *Mahābhārata*, is not recognised in the *dharmaśāstra* texts. The cremation of Pāṇḍu seems to be told twice, first very briefly (1.116.31) and then at considerable length (1.118.1–119.4). Tiwari regards this not as a case of ineptitude by redactors, but as an example of re-cremation of the remains of the same person, prescribed in the texts for those who have died in a distant foreign land.⁸³ His argument is that *punardaha* or re-cremation of some sort is specifically provided for in certain situations, such as those who have died in a distant, foreign land (citing *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 12.5.1.13–14 among other texts) and that the sages of the Himālaya brought just the remains or the charred bones of the couple (asserting that *śarīra*, especially in funerary contexts, means 'skeletal remains' or 'bones' and does so at 117.6+30 and 118.18). While

⁸² Tiwari definitely argues for this possibility (1979: 35–36).

⁸³ Tiwari 1979: 71–76.

possible, this explanation seems unnecessarily complex compared with the probability of careless repetition, especially in the light of the limited interest otherwise in the details of funerary practice.

Within the narrative proper, there is no allusion of any significance to education or related matters, apart from general references to the princes being instructed in knowledge of the Vedas and of the science of archery (*dhanurveda*) of the kind already noticed in the first chapter. Only in the very late *kaccit adhyāya* does there occur mention of textbooks on elephants, horses and chariots, on the science of archery and on civil engineering (*hastisūtrāśvasūtrāṇi rathasūtrāṇi ca . . . dhanur-vedasya sūtram ca yantrasūtram ca nāgaram*, 2.5.109cd and 110cd). By contrast, in didactic portions, there is frequent reference to such matters and, for example, the *sāstras* of Manu Svāyambhuva, Uśanas and Bṛhaspati are enumerated (12.322.41–44, cf. 58.1–3 and 59.87–92) and Yāska and his *Nirukta* are mentioned (12.330.8). Equally, there is a mention of proper forms of speech at 14.43.22d: *svaravyañjanasañskārā bhāratī* ‘[sacred] speech that is of correct formation of vowels and consonants’. Reference to writing is very limited but when made—though significantly examples seem to come exclusively from later portions—it suggests that it was quite well known.⁸⁴ For example, Nārada enquires in the *kaccit adhyāya* about those who count and write down the king’s income and expenditure (*gaṇakalekhakāḥ*, 2.5.62b), and it is tempting to see in the statement in the *Anuśāsanaparvan* ‘it will last long on the earth like an inscription made on a rock’ (*ciram tiṣṭhati medinyāṁ śaile lekhyam ivārpitam*, 13.126.43cd) an echo of Aśoka’s rock edicts.

There is little more in the way of allusions to any occupation or profession that requires extensive study. There are a number of references to medicine, doctors and medical implements in the context of wounds on the battlefield. Bhīṣma, when he is struck down, is attended by doctors, *vaidya*, who are skilled in removing arrows or lances, equipped with every instrument, clever and learned (6.116.51), and in an earlier context healing medicine is mentioned (*oṣadhi viśalyakaraṇī*, 6.77.10). In the *Śāntiparvan* Bhīṣma advises Yudhiṣṭhira to make provision for medicines and four types of doctor (12.69.57). Astrologers are mentioned occasionally, but mostly in didactic passages

⁸⁴ For a review of the evidence on writing in the *Mahābhārata* and the secondary literature concerning it see Falk 1993: 268–69.

(e.g. 2.5.31, 12.103.6–15 and 121.45–46). However, *vātika* ‘sorcerer’ occurs, though rarely, in earlier books (e.g. 5.62.21d, 7.120.72b and 135.39d), as does *vaitālika* ‘magician, conjuror’ (e.g. 1.175.16a, 2.4.5b, 4.67.28b, 7.58.2c). The term *horā* in the phrase *nāstikānām ca ye lokā ye 'gnihorāpitṛtyajām* at 7.16.34ab can hardly mean the rising of a zodiacal sign but has perhaps been generalised to mean a zodiacal sign; in any case as a clear borrowing from the Greek it cannot be very early.

On the other hand, various sorts of entertainment are referred to incidentally. Wrestlers, *malla*, are mentioned in the text occasionally—most notably when at the Brahmā festival Virāṭa has Bhīma matched with various champion wrestlers and then with wild animals (4.12.12–28)—and they are sometimes linked with dancers and boxers (*tatra malla naṭā jhallāḥ*, 2.4.5a and 14.69.7a, cf. 12.69.57ab; the three occupations are also associated at *Manu* 10.22 and 12.45); there is even a brief treatise on wrestling at Mbh. 2 App. 7 (inserted by many N manuscripts and G3 into the fight between Bhīma and Jarāsandha). Dancers are also mentioned elsewhere (e.g. 1.175.16a, 4.67.28b, 7.61.7d, 12.69.58a, 15.20.16c), as are other sorts of entertainers, but such references tend to be grouped—for example, actors, singers and various musical instruments are mentioned at 7.58.3–4—or the terms may be linked in a dvandva compound, such as *naṭanartakagāyanāḥ* at 3.16.14b, or a combination of these, as in *naṭā vaitālikāś caiva nartakāḥ sūtamāgadhāḥ* at 1.175.16ab. Various musical instruments are mentioned in the context of entertainment, as well as those mentioned on the battlefield; these include the *vīṇā*, the seven-stringed lute (*saptatantrī*, so explicitly in the number riddle contest between Aṣṭāvakra and Bandin at 3.134.13d), the *venu*, bamboo flute, and less commonly another kind of lute, *vallakī* (e.g. at 13.109.47ab, where all three instruments are mentioned together), as well as the general term, *vāditra*, for example at 4.32.49cd, where musical instruments and courtesans come out of the city to greet Virāṭa’s victory, with which may be compared the array of *bherī*, *tūryā*, conches, prostitutes, bards and eulogists with *pañava* and *tūryā* who come out to greet Uttara on his return from the battlefield (4.63.27–28).

Virāṭa’s palace naturally includes a dance hall, *nartanāgāra*, where Arjuna teaches the king’s daughters (4.23.17–18). The term *raṅgavāṭā* at 3.21.26b could mean either a stage or an arena, since the context is simply spectators applauding Kṛṣṇa, but clearly going on the stage is meant by *raṅgāvatarana* at 12.283.4a in the context of occupations

for the *varṇas*; however, there is no detailed reference to or description of plays being performed. There are references to puppets (*dārumayī yosā*) held and led on strings, and made to move their limbs at 3.30.23 and 31.22, 5.32.12 and 39.1. The man who holds the strings is called the *sūtradhāra* by Nīlakanṭha in his commentary on 3.30.23, in the *Bālarāmāyaṇa* and by Bharṭṛhari (*Vākyapadiya* 3.9.4), strongly suggesting that the word in its classical meaning of ‘manager of a theatre’ derives from an earlier meaning of ‘puppet-player, puppeteer’.

The greater degree of interest in the forms of entertainment than in types of learning reflects quite clearly the attitudes of the *kṣatriya* audience for whom the epic was originally composed, as well as that of the mass audiences to whom it must in later periods have been recited, as it grew to its present dimensions.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE *MAHĀBHĀRATA* (3)

In terms of the religious pattern visible in both epics—at any rate in their older parts—it makes a great deal of sense to link them with the Vedic literature. Reference has already been made in passing to the significance of sacrifice within the *Mahābhārata* and this is clearly a feature which tends to align it more with the Brāhmaṇas than with classical Hinduism. The deities alluded to or playing any part in the narrative are to a considerable extent also those of the Vedic pantheon. These will be surveyed in the first section of this chapter, after which ritual and other religious activity, various religious and philosophical concepts, the relationship of Viṣṇu and Śiva, the figure of Kṛṣṇa, the *Bhagavadgītā*, the other *avatāras*, Nārāyaṇa and the Pāñcarātra, and epic Sāṃkhya and Yoga will be taken up in successive sections.

Deities figuring in the narrative portions

Indra is particularly prominent, both as the ruler of the gods and as the performer of various heroic deeds, among the deities appearing in the *Mahābhārata*. Quite apart from the frequent mentions in similes or other figures of speech (for Indra is the favourite subject of such comparisons), the *Mahābhārata* includes briefer or longer narrations of his exploits. His slaying of Vṛtra is narrated in the *Śāntiparvan* (12.272–3, cf. 9.42, 12.270.13 and 14.11.6–20), despite its generally late character, and it also contains the story of Cirakārin, a parallel or even a parody of that of Rāma Jāmadagnya, in which Cirakārin hesitates for so long about killing his mother after Indra in the form of a brāhmaṇa had seduced her that his father Medhātithi has time to repent of his hasty decision (12.258). The *Āranyakaparvan* contains the story of Cyavana, which tells of the Aśvins' inclusion among the recipients of Soma, Indra's opposition to this and his being attacked by Mada, drunkenness (3.124–5, cf. 12.343 and 13.161), and the tale of Dadhīca whose bones form the *vajra* with which Vṛtra is slain in another version of that myth (3.98–99, cf. 12.329, which alludes to

several of Indra's exploits, including his slaying of Trisiras and his seduction of Ahalyā), as well as his responding to Surabhi's plea (3.10.4–19). The *Udyogaparvan* gives yet another version of the Vṛtra myth, where Indra first slays Viśvarūpa and then Vṛtra, both of whom have been created by Tvaṣṭṛ (5.9–10), before—weakened by the burdens of brahmanicide and treachery—he flees into the waters, concealing himself in a lotus filament, while Nahuṣa takes his place in heaven (5.11–17). However, Indra's prominence and his martial nature are clearly seen in the symbolic scheme of the five Pāṇḍava heroes being the sons of various gods, in which he fathers Arjuna. Indra is usually described, therefore, as lending his support to Arjuna but, when Agni in the form of a brāhmaṇa asks Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa to help in the burning of the Khāṇḍava forest, he seeks their help because Indra always protects the forest against him and they grant it (1.214.29–215.19).

The frequency with which Indra's banner occurs in similes in both epics suggests that it played a significant role at least in the earlier part of the period of their composition.¹ At the end of the year (*gate saṃvatsare* 1.57.18—in the story of the Cedi king Vasu, the first man to celebrate the festival) a new pole was erected as a repetition of Indra's cosmogonic act of 'propping up' the world pillar.² The special significance attached to the uprightness of the *indradhvaja* accounts for the stereotyped use of *utthita indradhvaja* in several of them. As long as the banner festival lasted, the *dhvaja* was believed to be identical with Indra but after the removal of the pole his role temporarily ended and he resumed his more modest task of *dikpāla* of the East. Thus the festival celebrated the short period when Indra was the cosmic centre but, since as the protagonist of the Devas he stood for only one of the two halves, the pole which was his symbol could not remain permanently.

Yama also figures quite frequently in similes and in various boastings by the warriors of the *Mahābhārata*, as is only natural for one whose

¹ Such similes occur for example at 7.14.29d, 67.68c, 68.65c, 9.3.18b, 11.23d and 16.52d. Equally, the episode in the *Harivamśa* where Kṛṣṇa lifts Mt Govardhana presumably reflects the supersession of an Indra festival by worship of Kṛṣṇa.

² For a detailed discussion of this passage, see Meyer 1937: part 3, *Indra*, pp. 3–6. In explanation of the phrase *gate saṃvatsare* Nīlakantha says: 'Nowadays one can still see the entry of the pole in Mahārāṣṭra and other countries at the end of the year' (*tasyāḥ śākrasya pūjārthan bhūmau bhūmipatiś tadā praveśāt kārayām āsa gate saṃvatsare tadā*); he is clearly referring to a custom that he knew from personal experience (around 1675 A.D.). Elsewhere the new moon day is the day of Indra (5.140.18.)

main role in the older pantheon was as king of the dead, whereas he has little part to play in developed Hinduism, since belief in his realm is at variance with the concepts of *karma* and *samsāra*. His presence, then, in the *Mahābhārata* is a clear indication of the older pattern persisting. Equally significant is the fact that in allusions to the *pralaya*, the cosmic dissolution (which is itself part of the more developed pattern), its presiding deity is most often Yama, and not Śiva as in the *Purāṇas*.³ Following an elaborate description of the *sabhā* of Brahmā Svayambhu, the world of kings is described as being in the *sabhā* of Yama and the snakes, rivers and seas in Varuṇa's *sabhā* (2.11.43–47). Varuṇa, however, is only a lingering survival (as for example in the compound *mahendravarunopama* at 7.9.37d), apart from his role as father of Agastya (e.g. 3.101.12, often jointly with Mitra, e.g. 3.101.13), but he dwells in the west on Mt Asta, the sunset mountain, and in the ocean (3.160.10–11, cf. 5.108.1–4, also 5.96.3–6), and he is found occasionally even in later passages (for example, named alongside Indra and Yama at 12 App. 28.288), in which he may particularly be the guardian of truth, ready with his nooses to punish those who offend against it (for example, 3.190.60). Similarly, as late as in the *Śāntiparvan* Pūṣan is named alongside Brahmā and Dhāṭṛ (12.15.18cd); Dhāṭṛ is mentioned only occasionally (e.g. 1.60.49c, 114.55a, 218.32c and 220.29b) and is merging with Brahmā.⁴

Another indicator of the pantheon of deities regarded as important is the inclusion of hymns to an individual god or lists of his names. The first to occur is the hymn to the Aśvins early in the *Ādiparvan* (1.3.60–70), which is presented in the form of a Vedic hymn and has been the subject of a detailed linguistic study by Louis Renou; both in form and in subject-matter this is definitely archaic.⁵ On the other hand it is closely followed by Uttaiṅka's hymn to the Nāgas (1.3.139–46), which invokes more popular divine beings. Others include the linked sequence of hymns to Agni and to Indra (at 5.16.1–8 and 13–18 respectively) and Yudhiṣṭhira's invocation of the 108 names of Sūrya (3.3.16–30, cf. 7.173, 12.325, 13.17 and 13.135, also the *Ādityahṛdaya* at Rām. 6 App. I.65).⁶

Both Agni and Sūrya are of interest, for Agni tends to be supplanted

³ See Lynn Thomas 1994.

⁴ Cf. S. C. Modhey 1982–83.

⁵ Renou 1939.

⁶ The 108 names of Sūrya at 3.3.16–30 is the prototype for *Skanda Purāṇa* 7.1.280.5–22 and *Brahma Purāṇa* 33.34–39.

later by Śiva, while Sūrya's popularity declines for a long period until revived by new beliefs and patterns of worship coming in from Iran. A lengthy narrative within the third book assigns to Agni the role in the seduction of the wives of the seven sages and in the birth of Skanda that later belongs to Śiva (3.213–5; some elements of this story occur also at 13.84.19–47). Earlier in the narrative, Agni instigates the burning of the Khāṇḍava forest and shares in its destruction with Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna in an episode which anticipates Indra's bestowal of weapons on Arjuna (1.214–225). There are also, of course, numerous allusions to Agni in his role as the sacrificial fire. Despite his decline in importance, Sūrya may still have been fairly significant; S. K. De, for example, includes worshippers of the sun as one of the four sects prevalent in the *Mahābhārata*.⁷ Certainly there is a definite reference to some brāhmans as not only following Vedic practices but also worshippers of the sun (*dāntān vedavratasnātān snātān avabhṛtheṣu ca | sahasrānucarān saurān aṣṭau daśāśatāni ca*, 7.58.15).

More generally, the pattern of divine activity is cast in the form of the opposition between Devas and Asuras and their various contests for supremacy (e.g. 3.92.6–10 or 12.160.26). This was recognised by Michael Viggo Fausbøll at the beginning of the century, although his work suffers from its euhemeristic approach.⁸ The myth of the churning of the ocean is narrated *in extenso* in the first book (1.15–17, cf. 5.100.1–13 and Rām. 1.45) and alluded to frequently elsewhere, while in that same book there is a full account of how the gods send Kaca to steal his secret from Śukra, the preceptor of the Asuras (1.71–72, cf. 12.271). The churning of the ocean is in fact narrated here in the first book as part of an even longer narrative of the Garuḍa legend (1.14–30) which, while acknowledging his links with Viṣṇu, treats him in the main as the independent figure that he was in the Vedic mythology and includes the story of his birth and how his enmity to snakes arose, as well as his seizing the nectar of the gods, for which Nārāyaṇa grants him the boon of immortality (1.29).⁹ Alongside these older figures we do find both a number of allusions

⁷ De 1953.

⁸ Fausbøll 1903.

⁹ Garuḍa then offers Viṣṇu a boon and he chooses that Garuḍa become his *vāhana* and the symbol on his banner (1.29.16). Two other passages make Garuḍa subordinate to Viṣṇu: at 5.103 Viṣṇu has to humble Garuḍa when he becomes proud of his ability to bear the supreme deity and at 12.324.30–33 Viṣṇu sends Garuḍa to help king Vasu.

and definite episodes relating to the deities Viṣṇu and Śiva, but even some of these show the older pattern. For example, at 1.59.16, Viṣṇu is the twelfth but greatest of the Ādityas and at 9.44.4 he is just one of the group of gods who come to pay reverence to Skanda when he is appointed commander of the divine army. Already in Vedic literature Viṣṇu's strides and other activities brought him into association with Indra and Indra's success in defeating Vṛtra and other demonic beings. His junior partnership with Indra persists into the epic period, but there Viṣṇu develops from an assistant into the superior, until Indra even appeals to Viṣṇu to help him.¹⁰ In the *Mahābhārata* Viṣṇu himself is relatively little mentioned, in contrast to Nārāyaṇa and Kṛṣṇa who in the course of time came to fuse with the Vedic figure who gives his name to the amalgamation, although Schneider seeks to show on the basis of Vedic, Epic and Purāṇic sources that Viṣṇu's third step pierced the sky and thus created the sun, which was considered as a hole in the firmament through which light penetrated into this world.¹¹ Vaikuṇṭha appears as a name for Viṣṇu and not for his heaven (for example at 6.9.15c, 21c and 21.15b).

At a slightly later stage, however, Brahmā becomes important and is credited with some of the cosmogonic myths associated in the later Vedic period with Prajāpati; essentially he is a fusion of a creator deity with the impersonal absolute of the Upaniṣads, Brahman, in a more popular and therefore a personalised form. Much of the evidence for this comes from the two epics but there is some other evidence, though scanty, to indicate that Brahmā was a major figure, seen as the supreme deity by some, during the last century or two B.C. and the first centuries A.D.¹² Mārkanḍeya describes Brahmā as four-faced and as being born from the lotus arising from Viṣṇu's navel (3.194.12–16).¹³ He is also commonly called Pitāmaha and there is a tendency to link him with brāhmaṇs and ascetics (e.g. 1.203).

¹⁰ For example, at 3 App. 16, Indra is perturbed by the threat from Naraka and concentrates mentally on Viṣṇu, who promises to kill Naraka for Indra's sake. Here Viṣṇu is developing from an assistant into a protector, whose active intervention is needed to get Indra, the gods and the world out of difficulties. Viṣṇu eventually reaches the position of using Indra as his demigurge and, being *indrakarman*, to work through him (13.149.97, cf. Rām. 6.105.16).

¹¹ Schneider 1974.

¹² Interestingly at 2.11.32, in Nārada's description of the great assembly halls of the gods, Nārāyaṇa is listed as one of the gods in Brahmā's entourage.

¹³ For details on the position of Brahmā in the *Āranyakāparvan*, see Neveleva 1975: 38–45.

Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva are mentioned together in something approaching the *trimūrti* concept at 13.14.183 (cf. also 12.328.17). In their middle and later stages, however, both epics amply attest the supremacy of Viṣṇu (as Kṛṣṇa or Nārāyaṇa) and Śiva, some passages favouring one and implicitly or explicitly demoting the other and vice versa. Since they ultimately became Vaiṣṇava works, the Vaiṣṇava emphasis tends to outweigh the Śaiva.

Ritual and other religious activity

Just as the pattern of deities found in the earlier parts of the narrative is broadly Vedic, or more specifically late and post Vedic, so too the religious activity mentioned reveals a pattern which still owes much to Vedic ritual. As we have seen already in the first chapter, the most specific information about Vedic rituals in fact occurs in the *Śanti* and *Anuśāsana parvans*—for example, the *vedī* at 12.29.44b and the *antarvedī* at 13.60.3a, a warning that women who make offerings into the fire go to hell at 12.159.19–20, the term *makha* at 12.255.37b+f (also 330.52b) and the *purodāśa* cake at 38c, the Agniṣṭut sacrifice (an *ekāha* sacrifice of the Agniṣṭoma type) along with *prāyaścittas* at 13.12.4, the Gosava and Aptoryāma sacrifices at 13.106.13–16, the Atirātra at 13.109.38 and the Dvādaśāha at 13.110.20d—but the clustering of such mentions and the degree of detail suggests that these are in fact learned references owed to brāhmaṇ redactors. The extent to which Vedic ritual was still a living reality is seen rather in the degree to which the narrative itself is structured around the *rājasūya* and other rituals, a feature also discussed in the first chapter. In addition, there are occasional direct references to Vedic ritual officiants or the ritual itself in the narrative books, though infrequently because of their basic subject matter; for example, the office of the *hotṛ* priest, *hotra*, is mentioned at 9.34.32d (and various ritual items in neighbouring verses).

Alongside features of this sort which later are marginalised, there are others such as *tapas* which can be traced back to a very early period but come to play an increasing role in more developed Hinduism, as well as features which only come to the fore well after the Vedic period, such as the cult of pilgrimage. Although *tapas* is often thought to be linked particularly with Yoga, in the *Mahābhārata* it is commonly just an efficacious method to achieve various mundane

ends, like several other practices. Even the term *ekāgramanas*, which with more justification is associated with Yoga, is used not only of Yogic discipline proper but also more or less as a general term of commendation.¹⁴ For example, the Kurus as they march out against the Pāṇḍavas are Veda-knowing heroes, all having well performed their vows and all having concentrated minds (5.197.3–4, cf. 6.53.3). Indeed, in some very late passages a direct comparison is made between the disciplined yogin and the warrior slain in battle, in that both are able to pierce the orbit of the sun (for example, *dvāv imau purusau loke sūryamandalabhedinau | parivrād yogayuktaś ca rane cābhimukho hataḥ*, 5.178*, cf. *Pañcatantra* 1.345). This, however, is simply making explicit what is implicit in many narrative passages where the warrior's death is described in terms of light imagery, of which the most prominent example is undoubtedly the description of Drona's death (7.165.34–40), to be examined further at the end of this chapter.

A major philological study of the term *tapas* in the *Mahābhārata*, where it occurs more than 3000 times, has been undertaken by Hara.¹⁵ He first notes the occasional definitions of *tapas* occurring in the text; for example, there is the verse that declares that *tapas* was supreme in the Kṛtayuga, knowledge in the Tretāyuga, sacrifice in the Dvāparayuga and giving in the Kaliyuga (12.224.27), while elsewhere it is defined in terms of concentration of the mind and sense organs (*manasaś cendriyāṇām cāpy aikāgryaṁ niścitam tapah*, 3.246.25). The definitions found in the discourses of Bhīṣma and of Krṣṇa are more systematic but they are simply formal definitions which do not reflect the actual usage; indeed, Hara argues that in these passages an attempt is being made to put a spiritual value on *tapas* while rejecting its older magical connotations. He therefore examines successively all the passages where *tapas* appears with one or more other nominal concepts, the adjectives which modify the term and the types of verb construed with it. Here the linking of *tapas* with *dharma* is noteworthy, as well as its association with concepts of expiation. Hara then discusses the efficacy of *tapas* in terms of the goals aimed at by the practice of asceticism: granting of boons (*vara*), curses (*sāpa*), supernatural knowledge, acquisition of higher rank or status, the ability to

¹⁴ Cf. Brockington 1986b.

¹⁵ Hara 1979. This study, though written in Japanese, contains an index locorum on pp. 497–503 and an English summary on pp. 504–518, on which the material in the rest of this paragraph is based.

create or destroy at will, purification, and various other supernatural powers. Finally, he examines the opposing beliefs in its omnipotence (for example, *sarvam tat tapasā śakyam tapo hi duratikramam*, 12.155.5cd, cf. the variant at 14.50.17cd, also 13.35.11c; commonly expressed throughout the *Śānti* and *Anuśāsana parvans*) and in its limitations (for example, in the face of death and destiny, or by comparison with either *bhakti* or *jñāna*), including comments on the fact that *tapas* is basically just a means or instrument to achieve other ends.

Subsequently Shee examined the terms *tapas* and *tapasin* in the narrative parts of the text, looking in the first half of her book at various episodes involving ascetics.¹⁶ These include the not infrequent accounts of Agastya, the son of Mitra and Varuṇa, born in a pot (*kumbhayoni*), and in particular his subduing of Vātāpi (3.94–97) and the cursing of Nahuṣa (of which the version in the *Udyogaparvan* seems the earliest). In the story of Yavakṛi ascetic power alone, represented by Yavakṛi, is presented as inferior to asceticism combined with or based on Vedic knowledge, represented by Raibhya (3.135–139). Pāṇḍu's austerities (1.109–118) differ in being *tapas* undertaken by a *ksatriya* not a brāhmaṇa and not so much to accumulate its power as to reach release; whereas Pāṇḍu here regards it as self-evident that *tapas* is a means to gain *mokṣa*, this is far from being the case in the truly narrative passages. In the second part of her book, Shee examines the various aspects of *tapas* revealed in these passages, including analysis of the terminology. Originally *tapas* lacked any religious aim and was not primarily connected with ideas of renunciation or salvation (the links with *yoga* and *saṃnyāsa* being therefore secondary); it was rather a form of power by which even the gods could be coerced and so was favoured by those who already have a hereditary disposition towards power, whether brāhmaṇas or kings. It is therefore natural that the performance of *tapas* by *śūdras* is not generally accepted in the epic, although she notes as a contrast with older views the story at 13.10 of a *śūdra* who lives an ascetic life, makes offerings to the gods and even undertakes the *pitṛkārya*, thereby gaining so much merit that in his next existence he is reborn as a king. Building on Hacker's views about Śamīka's asceticism as spiritual, which suggest a spiritualising and ethicising of the original *tapas* concept, she regards the outlook of the episode (1.45.20.–46.12, also 36.8–38.26)

¹⁶ Shee 1986. Her comments on some of these episodes have already been referred to in the section on the growth and development of the *Mahābhārata* in chapter 3.

as much closer to that of the didactic parts—themselves similar to the *dharmaśāstras*—and by implication as late. Among her other conclusions are that true *samnyasins* are absent from the narrative parts, that the *āśramas* are not successive, and that asceticism is regularly practised in pleasant surroundings (hermitages as idyllic locations). Overall, her findings are in close agreement with Hara's on the fact that *tapas* is basically a means to achieve various powers.

Pilgrimage to *tīrthas* is quite clearly a relatively late feature in the *Mahābhārata*, as discussion of the *Tīrthayātrāparvans* in the last two chapters have shown. Nevertheless, these passages are the oldest evidence for this particular form of religious activity and correspondingly valuable. Besides bathing, offerings to the gods and the ancestors and fasting are regularly mentioned as activities to be performed at the various *tīrthas* and the rewards to be gained are rated in terms of the reward gained by performance of *āśvamedhas*, *agnistomas*, *atirātrās* and similar Vedic sacrifices, although as yet the scale is on the whole relatively modest, since at Puṣkara, the *tīrtha* accorded the highest prestige, the rewards promised are the equivalent of ten *āśvamedhas* for bathing there, and reaching the world of Brahmā for a stay of twelve years (3.80.41–59). Occasionally the type of offering to be made is specified exactly; for example at Maladā at the evening *samdhyā* one should sprinkle oneself with water and then offer a *cāru* oblation into the seven-flamed fire for the ancestors, but equally its result is given in inflated terms as that of a thousand cows, a hundred *rājasūyas* or a thousand *āśvamedhas* (3.80.105–7). Pilgrimage may be undertaken either to gain merit or as a penance; for example, Janamejaya goes on pilgrimage to expiate the sin of killing a brāhmaṇ (12.146–148).

As noted in the fourth chapter, there are a number of passages in the *Śāntiparvan* which deal with the system of the four *āśramas* and thus recognise the status of the *samnyāsin*, but the pattern in the narrative parts is substantially different. When sages and hermits are mentioned there, they are regularly *vānaprasthas*, although the term itself is restricted to the *Ādi*, *Śānti*, *Anuśāsana* and *Āśvamedhika parvans*.¹⁷ For example, at the hermitage in the Dvaitavana, which is graced by the sounds of the Veda being recited, Baka Dālbhya declares at

¹⁷ In addition to the formulaic *vānaprastho 'tha bhikṣukah*, found at 12.15.12b, 234.13b, 321.1b, 14.45.13b (also 13 App. 13.32 post.), *vānaprastha* also occurs at 1.110.34a, 81.1d, 12d, 86.1c, 203.5b, 12.9.9a, 61.2a, 4c, 66.12a, 160.25c, 234.8b, 236.2d, 5b, 8a, 15c, 22d, 26b, 237.1b, 253.14c, 260.13b, 269.18a, 342.10c, 13.130.3c, 4a, 5c, 19b, 27.68a, 14.35.30d, 32c, 46.16d, 17b.

twilight that it is time for the fire oblations of the ascetic brāhmans (*brāhmaṇānāṁ tapasvinām*, 3.27.6). This is a typical pattern, which is repeated many times (for example in Yayāti's austerities at 1.81). Even when, as in a later passage such as Balarāma's *tīrthayātrā*, sages perform extreme austerities, grinding their grain with their teeth, living on air, feeding on leaves and the like (9.36.45–46), they also offer oblations, recite the Vedas and perform *agnihotras* (9.36.43–44). On the other hand, whereas the term *samnyāsa* as a term for renunciation is completely absent from the *Rāmāyaṇa*, in the *Mahābhārata* it is used a total of 53 times, according to Olivelle, who notes the following distribution pattern for the term: 22 in the *Bhagavadgītā*, 21 in the *Śāntiparvan*, 1 in the *Anuśāsanaparvan*, 5 in the *Anugītā*, and 4 elsewhere (2.8.33, 3.2.75, 9.49.54+55; also at 9.47.15 but not meaning renunciation).¹⁸ The extreme rarity of the term outside later didactic passages is obvious, although this is partly because other terms such as *bhikṣu* are used for members of either the third or the fourth stages. Olivelle suggests on this basis that the entry of *samnyāsa* into the vocabulary of renunciation may be placed around the 3rd–2nd century B.C., although the arguments adduced in the fourth chapter for the dating of these passages suggest that his dating should be lowered by several centuries. In the *Śāntiparvan* there are references to the typical accoutrements of the *samnyāsin*, the begging bowl, the triple staff and the yellow robe (e.g. 12.18.19+32, 308.47 and 311.13). More importantly there is the example of Vyāsa's son, Śuka, to whom the tradition attributes even higher sanctity than to his father, since he is recognised as the ideal renouncer with a complete knowledge of the absolute; his story is told in the *Śukacarita* (12.310–320), an episode studied by both Mackenzie Brown and Shulman.¹⁹

There are relatively frequent references throughout the epic to *caityas* as places of worship, most often probably a sacred tree or similar site (as is suggested by the compound *caityaarkṣa*, found for example at 6.3.37c and as a variant reading at 3.188.56a, and by the comparison of a warrior's fall to a *caitya* toppled by the wind, found at 7.37.7), although the Critical Notes on 12.29.18d suggest that it denotes 'cayanas or brick-piles for the Vedic sacrifice'.²⁰ This presumably reflects

¹⁸ Olivelle 1981.

¹⁹ Brown 1996, and Shulman 1993: 108–29. The fact that Śuka is Vyāsa's son is also mentioned at 1.57.74, 12.337.11 and 13.80.45.

²⁰ *Mahābhārata* 1933–66: XIII, ed. by S. K. Belvalkar (1961), 650. The term *caitya* occurs at 1.1.169c, 89.25c, 102.12b, 138.25c, 2.5.90c, 19.17b, 22.22d, 71.27c, 3.17.3c,

an ancient popular form of worship, not necessarily connected with Buddhism and indeed at times positively associated with temples and the like (e.g. 2.71.27 and 3.189.8), whereas the term *eduka*, ‘charnel houses’ in van Buitenen’s translation (3.188.64c and 66a), which people will worship at the end of the Yuga, may well denote a Buddhist stūpa. By contrast, examples of the later religious pattern involving image worship and temples are confined to the *Śānti* and *Anuśāsana parvans*. There the pattern at times seems very late, for example in the assigning of the temple priest, *devalaka*, to the status of *brāhmaṇa-candāla* (12.77.8, cf. 14 App. 4.3251–2), in the injunction that temple property, *devasva*, is not to be touched by a king even in extremities (12.134.2), or in the mention of *dīpavrkṣas* which are probably temple lamp standards (12.195.9c). Equally, the affirmation that *śrotriya* brāhmans are to be supported by the king (12.56.12–13) can be contrasted with the way that Kuntī calls Yudhiṣṭhira just a *śrotriya* as a reproach to his degree of understanding (5.130.6a), since this reflects changed attitudes in two respects, a higher regard for the *śrotriya* and restriction of Vedic learning to brāhmans.

Religious and philosophical concepts

The commonest meaning of *dharma* in the *dharmaśāstras* is the whole assemblage of duties incumbent on each individual according to his status (*varṇa*) and stage of life (*āśrama*). The *Mahābhārata* as a whole takes this understanding of *dharma* but through the various developments of its plot explores the problems of acting in accordance with *dharma*; to put it rather cynically, it is symptomatic of its approach that Yudhiṣṭhira, who is so often referred to as Dharmarāja, is the least decisive of the five brothers, as Draupadī is ready to point out on various occasions; more charitably, we may accept Greg Bailey’s characterisation that Yudhiṣṭhira ‘embodies a suffering which strongly reflects ascetic values’ and so is the most striking example of ‘the questioning of *dharma* by those who are obliged to uphold it’.²¹ Perhaps the most striking instance of the ambiguity of *dharma* is the debate

121.12b, 125.13e, 126.35a, 186.51d, 188.65c, 189.8a, 265.5c, 5.193.54d, 6.3.37c (°vrkṣa) and 7.37.7c in the first nine *parvans* and also, for example, at 12.69.39–40; cf. *caityaka* at 2.19.2d, 41a.

²¹ Bailey 1983: 119 and 124.

over the killing of the four Kaurava *senāpatis* but there is much other material pointing to the ambiguity of the concept; indeed, at such times the epic seems almost to be questioning the validity of the concept as such, while in the *Sānti* and *Anuśāsana parvans* it expounds its nuances as fully as any *dharmaśāstra*. Although this is the approach overall of the developed work, it is noteworthy that in the formulaic *pāda* (typical of the earlier strata) *sa hi dharmah sanātanah/esa dharmah sanātanah*,²² the meaning of *dharma* is rather ‘custom, tradition’.

The contrast between Yudhiṣṭhīra’s moral sense and the duties imposed on him by his position is a recurrent theme of the *Mahābhārata*, as is pointed up by the opposition to Duryodhana. This is basically an issue of ethics, since in some respects Duryodhana is actually a better exemplar of *kṣatriyadharma* than Yudhiṣṭhīra, who is often indecisive and has little inclination for warfare or the harsher aspects of ruling; this is very clear when he seeks Kṛṣṇa’s help in negotiations and proceeds to declare that war is evil in any form, that the *kṣatriya dharma* is evil and that war’s results are cruel (5.70.40–66, cf. 12.98.1), while after the battle he declares that victory is a great sorrow ever present in his heart (12.1.13–14, cf. 27.22 and 32.10). Kṛṣṇa praises him for his adherence to *dharma* and freedom from lust and greed, saying that his greatest delight is in liberality, truth, austerity, faith, tranquillity, endurance and tolerance (3.180.16–19). Significantly, Dhṛtarāṣṭra also describes Yudhiṣṭhīra as true to his word, always careful, obedient to his family, upright, loved by his subjects, kind to his friends, in control of his senses and protector of the good, and ascribes to him the royal virtues of forbearance, tolerance, self-control, honesty, truthfulness, attention, compassion and authority (5.147.32–33, cf. also 5.22.4–6). Yudhiṣṭhīra’s gentleness and tolerance, indeed his non-competitiveness, while they may exasperate the other characters at times, are also clearly seen as setting him apart from and above ordinary mortals on the ethical plane. Whereas Bhīma is all for taking immediate vengeance against the Kauravas for their insults after the dice match, Yudhiṣṭhīra urges acceptance of the terms of their exile. When Draupadī is being harassed by

²² *sa hi dharmah sanātanah* occurs at Mbh. 1.113.7d, 3.86.21d, 5.83.7b and 15.26.19b (also Rām. 2.152d, 21.10d, 27.30d), and *esa dharmah sanātanah* at Mbh. 1.113.13d, 3.13.6d, 30.50b, 152.9b, 281.20d, 4.50.7d, 12.96.13f, 128.30d, 131.2d, 298.9d, 13.44.32d, 96.46d and 14.50.37b (also Rām. 1.24.16b, 3.3.24b, 5.1.100b); cf. also *naiṣa dharmah sanātanah* Mbh. 1.158.20d, 5.86.17d, 9.30.12b and 12.259.12b, and *na sa dharmah sanātanah* Mbh. 12.139.70b.

Kīcaka, Yudhiṣṭhīra again urges acceptance of the situation and draws fierce condemnation from Draupadī for his lack of *kṣatriya* energy (4.20.28). His lapses from such standards are thus the more remarkable; indeed, his false statement that Aśvatthāman is dead, which Drona accepts to his doom, is declared at the end of the whole work to be his only sin (18.3.14).

The centrality of *dharma* as a theme in the *Mahābhārata*, and specifically the ambiguities involved in its operation, have long been recognised.²³ Examples are almost too numerous to mention but among the more significant are the dice game (where the frequency of the term *dharma* in 2.59–64 is quite remarkable) and the questionable means by which the four Kaurava *senāpatis* are killed, not to mention the extensive material included in the didactic portions. Indeed, it does seem to be the case that the epic is exploring the ability of the concept of *dharma* to provide a framework for social interaction and its adequacy to deal with varying situations. An early study on the main ethical problems of the *Mahābhārata* is that by Otto Strauss, which classifies them in terms of affirmative and negative trends (*pravṛtti/nivṛtti*) and analyses the interaction of these two trends.²⁴ This emphasises the importance of the householder stage of life and of the theory of *karma* for the *pravṛtti* way of life, while noting the relationship of *nivṛtti* to the teachings of Sāṃkhya and Yoga, to the stages of life and to *ahimsā* and related ideas, and suggesting the process of their accommodation to each other by the re-interpreting of *nivṛtti* ideals to conform to *pravṛtti*.

The concepts of *karma* and *samsāra* are already attested in parts of the narrative books by some of the incidental episodes narrated, as well as by casual remarks attributed to the characters. For example, Śakuntalā puts the blame for her rejection by Duḥṣanta on some evil deed in a previous life (1.68.70), Māṇḍavya's suffering is the result of past wanton cruelty, although he disputes the justice of the punishment and lays down that children are not responsible for their actions (1.101),²⁵ Vyāsa declares that Draupadī gained a boon of five

²³ It is not surprising, therefore, that they have been the subject of study from the time of the younger Holtzmann onwards. Some recent books which concentrate on the topic are by Norbert Klaes (1975) and Binod Sarma (1978), and a collection ed. by Bimal Krishna Matilal (1989).

²⁴ Strauss 1911.

²⁵ Hopkins was inclined to see in the story of Māṇḍavya signs of Christian influence, a supposition rightly rejected by Richard Garbe (1914). Hopkins also looks

husbands from Śiva in a previous birth (1.157.6–14) and Draupadī attributes her present misery to a past offence against the gods (4.19.28). However, Yudhiṣṭhīra on occasion suggests that the operations of the law of *karma* are ‘mysteries of the gods’ (*devaguhyāni*, 3.32.33d) while urging on Draupadī compliance with *dharma*. But sins can be removed by visiting *tīrthas* (3.80.45 etc.) or by sacrifice (for example, Indra is freed from the sin of brahmanicide by performing an *āśvamedha* at 5.13.12–18).

Equally, various other determinants of human destiny are mentioned in the narrative, sometimes as distinct from *karma* and sometimes not: divine acts (*divyakriyā*) or decrees (*divyavidhi*), fate (*daiva*, *diṣṭa*, *niyatī*, *bhāgya*), time (*kāla*), death (*mṛtyu*, *kṛtānta*, *antaka*) and nature (*prakṛti*). Bruce Long, in a study which examines the *Mārkanḍeyasamāṣyāparvan* (3.179–221) and the *Anugītā* (14.16–50) in particular, suggests that the idea of the cosmos existing in the form of a vast living organism forms the framework of ideas within which the authors shaped their views on human destiny.²⁶ Shulman looks at the relationship between the dicing which is central to the narrative and the concept of fate, *daiva*, which he suggests is a force that drives and intoxicates the individual and so lays him open to the dynamic forces at work in the universe.²⁷ On the other hand, Peter Hill argues that belief in the efficacy of human action and the ability to control one’s destiny is powerfully expressed in myths about the great sages in the *Mahābhārata* through the mastery of the natural world and the potency of their *tapas* displayed by the *pravṛtti*-oriented sages, whereas he elsewhere examines the issue of individual responsibility through Dhṛtarāṣṭra’s culpability for the family feud and Yudhiṣṭhīra’s participation in the dice game, mainly in terms of fate (*daiva* and *diṣṭa*), while the evidence of concern for the individual as the basis of all values, in those passages where the main characters reflect on the events in which they have been involved, has led Bailey to think of humanistic elements in the epic.²⁸ In their attitudes towards *karma*

at *Mahābhārata* material in his 1906 article, and Goldman also has some remarks on the story of Māṇḍavya (1985).

²⁶ Long 1980.

²⁷ Shulman 1992.

²⁸ Hill 1995 and 1993, and Bailey 1993. Other contributions to this recent examination of ethical issues include one, propounded by David Gitomer (1992), which sees Duryodhana as a remnant of an older heroic ideal devoted to this-worldly values of *dharma* and hostile to the new *bhakti* of Kṛṣṇa, and an extensive discussion of *ahimsā* by Proudfoot (1987).

and related concepts, as in their view of *dharma*, the authors of the *Mahābhārata* are both more subtle and less consistent than was once realised. Whereas the *Śāntiparvan* usually emphasises that no one acquires the good or evil act of another but gains only the results of his own deeds (e.g. 12.149.33–34 and 280.15–21) and even indicates that the results appear at the corresponding period of the next life-time (e.g. 12.174.15, cf. the almost identical 13.7.4), it also in contrast suggests that the results of a man's evil acts may appear in his sons, grandsons or descendants (12.137.19, cf. 1.75.2), and other late passages actually envisage the transfer of *karma*, as when Aṣṭaka and other sages offer the falling Yayāti any worlds that they possess, which Yayāti as a good *kṣatriya* does not deign to accept (1.87–88, cf. 13.6.30 where he is reinstated by the good deeds of his descendants).

As some of the instances cited above suggest, there occur at various points in the narrative both the older religious patterns based on sacrificial ritual, leading to *svarga*, and the newer patterns of worship, such as visiting *tīrthas*, which are usually seen as leading to *mokṣa* and which are more prominent in the didactic parts, as well as more popular beliefs, such as that in omens and portents (seen prominently in the list of such omens at 6.2.17–3.42). Indeed, in later passages different approaches are deliberately contrasted. For example, in the *Jāpakopākhyāna* (12.189–193), in response to questions from Yudhiṣṭhira, Bhīṣma declares that *japa*, the murmuring of Vedic verses, constitutes an independent discipline and way of life belonging to the Vedic sacrificial tradition and different from Sāṃkhya and Yoga, in which *japa* is sometimes made use of but is not indispensable; Bhīṣma emphasises that a *jāpaka* practising *japa* with a true selfless spirit is equal to a yogin in the matter of fruit or achievement, narrating the story of the great *jāpaka* Kauśika Paippalādi to illustrate his point. The *japa* described belongs to the Vedic ritual tradition as represented in the Brāhmaṇas, attaching magico-mystical significance to *mantras* and their recitation and, from the laudatory description of the *jāpaka* with which the passage ends, its authors are clearly trying to meet the challenge of Yoga by presenting *japa* as a viable alternative, while at the same time incorporating various elements associated with Yoga. Less directly, another more traditional practice is extolled in the *Uñcharptyupākhyāna* (12.340–353), which is devoted basically to extolling the merits of living on the grain gleaned after harvest, for a brāhmaṇ who follows this way of life is described as having become a great light which was like a second sun, illuminating all the worlds with his light (350.8–15), in a manner reminiscent

of the description of Drona's death. The same practice is praised in the story of Mudgala in the *Vṛihadraṇikaparvan* ('The Measure of Rice' as van Buitenen terms it, 3.245–247), since he subsists on gleaning rice, using the measure that he collects in the fortnight up to the full moon each month not only to feed his family but also to feed brāhmaṇ guests, even maintaining his equanimity when put to the test by Durvāsas, the famously ill-tempered ascetic.

Svarga is obtained by good deeds but the individual returns from there after the accumulated merit has been expended. Thus, Indradyumna fell from heaven when his merit was exhausted (3.190.2). Maudgalya (as Mudgala is here called at the climax of the story just mentioned) scorns the depiction of heaven by the envoy of the gods precisely on the grounds that one's stay there is finite (3.247.38–40) and chooses instead to pursue the eternal and supreme perfection characterised by *nirvāṇa* (3.247.42–43).²⁹ Means of reaching *svargaloka* still form a significant component of the teaching of the *Anuśāsanaparvan*. In *adhyāya* 57 Bhīṣma tells Yudhiṣṭhira about various penances by which to gain *svargaloka*: eating nothing but fruit, sleeping on the bare ground, bathing three times a day in cold water. Then comes a lengthy description in 58–86 of the giving of charity, in particular of cows, food and gold; 61–65 describe how food should be given to worthy brāhmaṇs, as well as the way and the time to make such gifts; 70–73 describe how and to whom gifts of cows should be made and declare that the heaven so gained is higher than that gained by giving food; in 74 *dama* or restraint, proper performance of one's caste duties, performing *yajñas* and observing celibacy are propounded as means to reach *svargaloka*, and in 75–78, at Yudhiṣṭhira's request, Bhīṣma again discourses on giving cows in charity, with the last chapter stating that the length of stay in *svargaloka* depends on the number and the quality of the cows given. Bhīṣma describes how women may get to heaven by serving their husbands faithfully and devotedly in 124. In 132, Śiva tells Umā about the ethical behaviour which produces rewards in heaven, such as not injuring others, not coveting other men's property or wives, penance, speaking the truth and welcoming guests, while in 133 Śiva describes those who will be punished in hell after death.

²⁹ For some remarks on this passage, including the inserted 1193* with its Vaiṣṇava orientation, as well as Mudgala as the author of *Rgveda* 10.102 and the *Mudgala Upaniṣad*, see Gonda 1968–69.

However, the more usual emphasis in the didactic sections is on *samsāra*; for example, Bhīṣma devotes a lengthy chapter to its workings at 13.112. In the main, the emphasis in the didactic sections is on the various practices which affect the individual's *karma*. For example, in 13.26–27 different *tīrthas* are described, as well as the ritual behaviour such as bathing, celibacy and fasting that should be performed at each and the resulting reward, various fasts and vows are prescribed in 13.109, varying according to the performer's *varna*, while 13.116–7 extoll the merits of not eating meat. At times the older sacrificial ritual is said to be less valuable or efficacious than such practices. In general terms, the didactic sections reveal an outlook close to that of classical Hinduism, in contrast to the older more sacrificial and *svarga*-oriented pattern of the older narrative passages.

Similarly, in the degree of acquaintance with developed systems of thought, there is a marked contrast between the absence of reference to them in the earlier narrative (where both subject matter and date are clearly factors) and the frequency of mention in the *Śāntiparvan* in particular. The epic evidence on Sāṃkhya and Yoga will be examined in the final section of this chapter and that on the Pāñcarātra movement, and also the Vaikhānasas, in the penultimate section, but it will be convenient to make a few remarks here about other groups or systems. On the whole, such references are disparaging or condemnatory, although in what appears to be the only direct allusion to the Saura cult Yudhiṣṭhira greets Saura brāhmaṇas as part of his morning rituals (7.58.15); indirect evidence for it includes the list of the 108 names of the Sun (3.3.17–30) and Karṇa's words of devotion to the Sun, his natural father (3.286.1–5). Interestingly, among the features of the Cārvāka who comes forward to challenge the right of Yudhiṣṭhira to assume the kingship after the end of the battle are not only that he is really a Rākṣasa (12.39.33 and 39) but that he is a follower of Sāṃkhya in the form of a triple-staffed *bhikṣu* (12.39.23, cf. 33). Vyāsa appears to refer to the views of the Mīmāṃsakas and of the Jains at 12.224.50–51, while Brahmā refers to the views of Cārvākas, Tārkikas, Mīmāṃsakas, Bauddhas, Advaitins, Dvaitins, Bhedābheda-vādins, Vaiśeṣikas, Kālavādins and others at 14.48, according to the Critical Notes on that *adhyāya*. All of these last three passages appear to be particularly late, as does that in which Śiva, holding forth to Umā on the *dharma*s of the four *varṇas* individually and collectively, lists four types of *bhikṣu* (Kuṭicara, Kṛtodaka, Haṃsa and Paramahamsa, 13.129.29, cf. 12.325.4) and then various types

of *muni*: *phenapa*, Vālakhilya, *cakracara*, *sampraksāla*, *aśmakutṭa*, *dantolūkhalin*, *somapa* and *ūṣmapa* (13.129.35–46).

The relationship of Viṣṇu and Śiva

As was noted in chapter two, one strength of Madeleine Biardeau's interpretation is that she has been able to give a more comprehensive and discerning account than before of Kṛṣṇa as the *avatāra* of Viṣṇu, and also of Śiva.³⁰ She traces their complementarity back to the Brāhmaṇas with their sacrificial emphasis and discerns Śiva's presence as destroyer in various parts of the narrative, particularly in the person of Aśvatthāman in the *Sauptikaparvan*. Alf Hiltebeitel has also focused on the episode of the night killing in one of his articles.³¹ After extended analyses of the views of Dumézil and Biardeau on the eschatological symbolism underlying the *Mahābhārata* (the one based on comparisons with the Scandinavian myth of the Ragnarök and comparing Yudhiṣṭhīra with Baldr, the other utilising the symbolism of the *pralaya*), Hiltebeitel seeks to show that the *Sauptikaparvan* is structured on the myth of Dakṣa's sacrifice and to present Abhimanyu, 'the figure who represents the plant of immortality (Soma)', as the equivalent of Baldr, 'slain *with* the plant of immortality (mistletoe)', linking Baldr's reappearance as ruler of the renewed world with Kṛṣṇa's revival of Abhimanyu's still-born child, Parikṣit. In his subsequent book, *The Ritual of Battle*,³² Hiltebeitel develops the idea of a central myth of sacrificial destruction and renewal, in which, following Biardeau, he sees Kṛṣṇa and Śiva as having complementary roles. However, he adopts a significantly less dogmatic approach and, while indebted to both Dumézil and Biardeau, he is less convinced of the existence of a single organising structure. Nonetheless, his view of the centrality of Kṛṣṇa does lead him, for example, curiously to dismiss as 'rather inadequately' presented Georg von Simson's well-argued and convincing demonstration from textual considerations that the *Bhagavadgītā* is indeed an interpolation (to be precise an interpolation into an already expanded passage).³³ Although there are weaknesses

³⁰ Biardeau 1968–78.

³¹ Hiltebeitel 1972–73.

³² Hiltebeitel 1976b.

³³ Hiltebeitel 1976b: 120 n. 21, dismissing von Simson 1969.

in his use of texts, which he often conflates in a questionable fashion,³⁴ his work is stimulating in the range of its ideas, as well as the breadth of material on which it draws.

More recently Laine has begun his examination of the *Mahābhārata* as a source for a fuller understanding of Hinduism by acknowledging the work of Dumézil and Biardeau, while suggesting that their structural theories are too constrictive, and by applauding Hiltzebeitel's broader-based view.³⁵ Laine's own approach is through the theophanies included within the narrative of the epic, among which he distinguishes three types: the initiation visions of the Pāñdavas (Arjuna's meeting with Indra, Arjuna's encounter with Śiva as a Kirāta, Bhīma's encounter with Hanumān and Yudhiṣṭhīra's encounter with Dharma), wartime visions (Kṛṣṇa's embassy to the Kaurava Court, Arjuna's vision of Kṛṣṇa in the *Bhagavadgītā*, Arjuna's dream of Śiva, Aśvatthāman's vision of Kṛṣṇa and Śiva, and Bhīṣma's vision of Kṛṣṇa) and visions by seers (Mārkandeya's vision at the *pralaya*, Nārada's vision of Nārāyaṇa, Upamanyu's and Kṛṣṇa's visions of Śiva, and Uttara's vision of Kṛṣṇa). The number of passages involved itself attests the significance of the material. Laine claims that each was written with an awareness of at least some of the others, although this plausible view is asserted rather than closely argued. Equally, he suggests a broad developmental pattern in which the *Bhagavadgītā* is a transitional text between the visions in his first two groups and the visions by seers, which for him have crossed the divide from the heroic concerns of the epic to the mythical-theological speculation characteristic of the *Purāṇas*. Nevertheless, he is reluctant to see his model of interacting traditions as a historical account of the developments and in general conducts his argument along the lines of likely influence rather than engaging in detailed textual analysis. He does, however, bring out the frequency of mention of Nara and Nārāyaṇa in these theophanies.

The complementarity of Viṣṇu and Śiva has again been taken up by Jacques Scheuer in a book on Śiva in the *Mahābhārata*, produced under Biardeau's supervision.³⁶ Despite his title, the author declares immediately that he is going to study Śiva only in his relation to the central myth of the *Mahābhārata*—indicating that he believes myth to be the basis of the epic narrative, though without any examination

³⁴ On this point, see Laine 1986: 79.

³⁵ Laine 1989.

³⁶ Scheuer 1982.

of the generic relationship between myth and epic—and he is far from providing a complete survey of Śiva's occurrences in the epic. For Scheuer Śiva has the destructive role, so that, while Kṛṣṇa advises and in a sense supervises the destructive war, Śiva is actively involved in the slaughter. In addition to the episodes where Arjuna fights with Śiva disguised as a Kirāta (3.38–41)³⁷ and where Aśvatthāman is in a sense possessed by Śiva when he enters the Pāṇḍava camp by night and slaughters everyone there (10.7–8),³⁸ Scheuer concentrates especially on the figure of Durvāsas as a manifestation of Śiva. No real supporting evidence is given for this identification apart from Durvāsas' irascible and uncouth nature, on which basis all ascetics could be equated with Śiva (which is indeed valid in many respects but undermines any claim to uniqueness for Durvāsas). Scheuer's overall theme, the view of the epic as basically a myth of destruction and renewal, is obviously derived from Biardeau's *pralaya* emphasis. However, there is much about Śiva in the *Mahābhārata* that he does not say (because he does not see it as related to the 'central myth'). He ignores for example the several hymns of praise to Śiva, at 7.172–3, 8.24.113–123, 10.7.2–11 (uttered by Aśvatthāman before the night attack), 13.14–15 and 17 (*adhy.* 17 is the *Śivasahasranāmastotra*), 18, 145–6 (the *Īśvarapraśāṁśā* or *Maheśvara-māhātmya*), and 12 App. 28.

There are also a number of other episodes where Śiva figures in the narrative. One where he is fairly central to the story as we have it, and which Scheuer therefore does discuss to some extent, is that in which Śiva ordains that Draupadī shall have five husbands. To be exact, there are two versions of this, in the first of which Draupadī in a former life makes repeated requests to Śiva for a husband and is granted the same number as her requests (1.157.6–14, 1.189.41–49), and in the second of which Śrī, having witnessed five Indras being subdued by Śiva, is herself born as their wife when they take birth as the five Pāṇḍavas (1.189.1–39). We see here unmistakable

³⁷ The actual combat is narrated in 3.40 and Śiva's explanation and giving of the weapons in 3.41. Reference to the arms so gained is also found at 7.53.43 (cf. 7.57.16).

³⁸ Already at 1.61.67 (cf. 15.39.15) Aśvatthāman is born 'from portions of Mahādeva, Death, Lust, and Fury, rolled into one.' Elsewhere he is born by Śiva's favour (9.5.15), received numerous favours from Rudra in a previous life (7.172.82–86) and pays homage to Rudra and Kṛṣṇa (7.172.91). In his night attack on the Pāṇḍavas, after his repulse by their mysterious guardian, Aśvatthāman resorts to Śiva (who then appears) and offers him a sacrifice, apparently of himself (10.6.32 and 10.7), and is possessed by Śiva (10.7.64ff.).

elements of Śiva as the supreme deity supplanting the old ruler of the gods and even being superior to his rival Viṣṇu. Elsewhere, in even later passages, Nālāyanī is given a boon by Rudra or Paśupati that she will be reborn as Draupadī and have five husbands—her one husband, the sage Maudgalya, not having satisfied her in this existence (1 App. 100, a Southern insert) and again (at 1 App. 102.15–18) Draupadī is Pārvatī and the five Pāṇḍavas are the five faces, *mukhāni*, of Śiva (at lines 28ff. the five Pāṇḍavas represent five aspects of Śiva). From the opposite end of the whole work, when Yudhiṣṭhīra enters heaven, he finds there, among others, Draupadī, described as fashioned by Śiva for the pleasure of the Pāṇḍavas (*rathyartham bhavatām hy esā nirmitā sūlapāṇinā*, 18.4.10). Similarly, Ambā is granted the boon of Bhīṣma’s defeat by Śiva and her birth as the girl who is to become Śikhaṇḍīn takes place by Śiva’s will (5.188–9).

There are a considerable number of references to Dakṣa’s sacrifice and, explicitly or implicitly, to Śiva’s role in its disruption (at 7.69.56, 7.202, 10.18, 12.274.2–58, 12.343, 13.1.32, 13.17.51, 13.76 and 13.160–1). Other sacrificial activity is connected with Śiva in one way or another; for example, 2.3.13, following a reference to Indra alone, continues ‘where [in the Himālayas] Nara and Nārāyaṇa, Brahmā, Yama, and Sthānu as the fifth, attend a sacrificial session every thousand Yugas.’ Again, Jarāsamṛda’s success comes from worship of Mahādeva (2.13.62)³⁹ and at 2.14.17 Kṛṣṇa asks, in relation to Jarāsamṛda’s planned sacrifice, ‘What pleasure in life is there for the kings who have been sprinkled and purified in the house of Paśupati as sacrificial animals, bull of the Bharatas?’

Elsewhere Śiva grants boons in return for austerities and these tend to be associated with violence and destruction. Jayadratha, in his anger with the Pāṇḍavas, goes for help to Virūpākṣa Umāpati (3.256.25) and undertakes austerities, but Śiva does not grant him all he asks (3.256.28, also App. 27.1–82). However, Jayadratha uses the boons secured from Śiva to secure Abhimanyu’s death (7.51.9). In the account of the killing of Jayadratha to avenge Abhimanyu’s death, Kṛṣṇa tells Arjuna to pray to Śiva and Arjuna in meditation or a dream sees himself and Kṛṣṇa travelling to Śiva’s abode in the Himālayas. Śiva is described as an archer (*iśvāsadhara*) and an ascetic (*taponitya, valkalājjinavāsas*) and accompanied by Pārvatī and hosts of

³⁹ The fuller version including 162* is relevant; cf. also 2.17.19, where Jarāsamṛda is promised a vision of Śiva.

bhūtas (7.57.34–38); they recite Vedic litanies to him (39–45); Śiva asks why they have come and is praised again (49–58) with litanies more specific to Rudra-Śiva; Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna then ask for the only weapon that will achieve their purpose (59–62).⁴⁰ Śiva directs them to the lake of *amṛta* where his bow and arrow are deposited, there they see two monstrous snakes and they chant the *Śatarudriya* to turn them back into Śiva’s bow and arrow (63–81). Specifically Arjuna practises *yoga* and devotion to Śiva during the battle (7.57.17–20 and 7.418*).⁴¹ Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna later recount the event to Yudhiṣṭhīra and others and all pay homage to Śiva (7.60.5–7).

The mutual relationship between Kṛṣṇa and Śiva seen here is found in different forms in various other passages. Within the *Āranyakaparvan* account of the birth of Skanda, Śiva (under various names, including Hara, Paśupati and Rudra) is mentioned along with other gods but is obviously of particular importance (especially in 3.221); incidentally, in the *Skandābhiseka* in the *Śalyaparvan* Skanda is attended by the Seven Mothers (*saptamātṛgaṇāḥ*, 9.43.29a) and by a whole host of named *mātr* figures (9.45.1–29). Rudra or Śiva is not infrequently regarded as a form or manifestation of Viṣṇu or Kṛṣṇa (e.g. 3.13.20, 3.50* 5, 3.174* 4, 3.187.32, 5.129.5, 12.47.52, cf. also Samkarṣaṇa replacing Rudra in the *pralaya* at 12.47.20), while Nārāyaṇa declares that he is Viṣṇu, Brahmā, Indra, Śiva, and various other gods at 3.187.5–6. Nārāyaṇa, born as the son of Dharma, practised asceticism and so gained a *darśana* of Rudra, chanted his praises and gained the boon that no other being could resist him (7.172.50–78). Within the *Nārāyanīya* Rudra is first subordinate (12.328.16) but then equated with Nārāyaṇa, who even worships Rudra in turn (20–21) and identifies him with his own self (25–26), and it is declared that whoever knows one, knows the other (33); at 12.330, however, Rudra fights Nara and Nārāyaṇa.

During the battle, Arjuna sees a mysterious person going in front of him and killing those whom he then strikes (7.173.1–8); Vyāsa reveals this to be Saikara (9–10) and in later inserts declares that he is the god whom Kṛṣṇa showed him on the mountain-top before Jayadratha’s death (7.1471*+1472*, cf. 7.57), the god from whom Arjuna received weapons before fighting the Asuras (100). The next part of 7.173 has Vyāsa recommending homage to Śiva (10–39),

⁴⁰ Kṛṣṇa joining Arjuna in making the appeal to Śiva suggests that here Śiva is seen as of higher status than Kṛṣṇa.

⁴¹ This episode is referred to by Scheuer 1982: 259; cf. also Mbh. 7.173.

followed by Śiva's exploits (40–64) and nature (65–98), which include his retaliation against the gods when refused a share of the sacrifice (37–51), his transformation into a little child on Umā's lap (59) and his immobilisation of Indra (60).⁴² At 12.330.68ff. (in the *Nārāyanīya*) Kṛṣṇa identifies this person going before Arjuna as Rudra or Kāla. So too, in an even later passage, Bhīma, after recommending his brothers to propitiate Śiva (14.62.13 and 64.2), recalls various interventions by Śiva on their behalf: giving Arjuna the Pāśupata and Brahmaśiras weapons, showing favour to the Pāñḍavas as a group, Arjuna gaining the weapon to kill Jayadratha, and so on (at 14.133*).

At 13.14–18 there occurs what may broadly be seen as a Śaiva equivalent of the *Nārāyanīya*; the passage is a substantial one, since *adhyāyas* 14 and 17 are among the longest in the *Mahābhārata*. The framework is Kṛṣṇa's worship of Śiva in order to get a son, Sāmba, who is born to his wife, Jāmbavatī. In *adhyāya* 14 Kṛṣṇa, here identified as being Viṣṇu, describes how he went to the Himālayas to worship Śiva for this purpose and his meeting with the sage Upamanyu. Upamanyu describes how, after propitiating Śiva with austerities for a thousand years, he was approached by Indra, who offered him any boon he wished. Upamanyu states that he is willing to become a worm or a tree if that is Paśupati's will but without that he does not want even to rule the whole world (14.95–104)—the emphasis on worship and devotion is noteworthy—and when finally Śiva reveals himself before his devotee, shedding his disguise as Indra, Upamanyu's sole request is that his devotion may continue for ever (*bhaktir bhavatu me nityam sāśvatī twayi śamkara* 14.187cd).⁴³ On the other hand, Śiva is also praised as the *puruṣa* of the Sāṃkhya and the goal of Yogins (14.154–5, cf. 15.40–43), but it is through his grace that the goal is reached or not (16.63–64). Most of *adhyāya* 17 is a Śivasahasranāma (still used in Śaiva temples in Tamilnadu), by which one gains the self through the self (*prāpnaty atmānam ātmanā*, 17.153d); throughout this chapter there is considerable emphasis on devotion to Śiva for its own sake, while the Śivasahasranāma is broadly parallel to the Viṣṇusahasranāma at 13.254.⁴⁴

Other references to Śiva's activity associate him with procreation

⁴² The last two features are traced back to their Brāhmaṇa origins by Hans Bakker (1996b: 7–11).

⁴³ Upamanyu's vision of Śiva is discussed and translated by Laine (1989: 166–67 and 201–17).

⁴⁴ There is a translation of the *Viṣṇusahasranāma* by V. Raghavan (1956b: 421–35).

and fertility. For example, Gāndhārī gained the boon of a hundred sons from Hara (1.103.9) and Sagara performs austerities and invokes Śiva with a wealth of epithets who then grants him 60,000 sons by one wife and a single son by the other (3.104.10–21). These are just two of numerous indications that the view of Viṣṇu as creator and Śiva as destroyer, even in the somewhat more sophisticated form in which Biardeau presents it, will not do justice to the material. Nor does it fall simply into the ascetic/erotic contrast in Śiva's own character which can be seen in Purāṇic Hinduism. Indeed, it is open to question how far the phallic aspect is linked with Śiva in the *Mahābhārata*.⁴⁵ Early in the 20th century B. C. Mazumdar roundly asserted that 'the only chapters in which the Linga is found mentioned as a form of and name for Śiva . . . are all palpable interpolations of a very late date', while in the middle of the century N. Chaudhuri regarded references to worship of the *linga* in the *Mahābhārata* as the earliest evidence for the coming together of an earlier *linga* cult, unconnected with Rudra, and the cult of Śiva, by now linked with the mother-goddess cult.⁴⁶ Neither view is entirely satisfactory and much more careful study needs to be undertaken of these early phases of Śaivism, for which the *Mahābhārata* is a valuable source, if it is recognised as more than simply a record of developing Vaiṣṇavism.

Both epics clearly are that, but they are much more than that and the weakness of most structuralist approaches is that they tend to be too static and thus not to allow room for the dynamics of textual development. Equally, much textual work on the epics has concentrated on isolated elements and ignored their larger setting. Yet, if studied with sufficient respect for what they really have to say the epics can reveal a great deal about the fascinating process by which Vedic religion with its multiplicity of gods is transmuted into that form of classical Hinduism where one deity is regarded as supreme. However,

⁴⁵ For the record, references of any kind to the *linga* occur at 7.172.86–87 (made by Kṛṣṇa), 173.83–4, 92cd, 94 (probably ascetic in fact), 12.160.46c (*mahālingah*), 13.14.101, 17.45c, 74a (*mahālingah*), 83d (*mahāmedrah*), 139ab and 146.16. The mention at 7.172.86–87 is considered late by Hopkins (1915: 222); however, S. K. De affirms in the Critical Notes on 7.172.86–90: 'This is perhaps the earliest recorded reference to the Linga-worship, in which the epic Śiva is conceived as a phallic deity. . . . Hopkins is not justified in his conjecture that these passages are mere interpolations which should be disregarded. If they are additions, they must have got into the epic text before our present manuscript-tradition begins; for both the N and S recensions include them' (*Mahābhārata* 1933–66: VIII–IX).

⁴⁶ Mazumdar 1907a; Chaudhuri 1948.

this trend found expression in other forms than just the rise of Viṣṇu and Śiva. There is the evidence, particularly of the epics, that Indra maintained some kind of supremacy in more popular belief longer than most Vedic deities, while a personalised form of the abstract Brahman, the deity Brahmā, achieved prominence for a time. As already noted, in the earliest layers of both epics Indra is still a prominent and frequently mentioned deity; his exploits in defeating Vṛtra, Bali, Namuci and the like are frequently made the standard for assessing the strength and bravery of human heroes. His prominence and his martial nature are reflected in the myth of the five Pāṇḍavas as the sons of the gods, for he is the father of Arjuna. At a slightly later stage, however, Brahmā becomes important and is credited with some of the cosmogonic myths associated in the later Vedic period with Prajāpati.

In their middle and later stages both epics then begin to attest the supremacy of Viṣṇu and Śiva, some passages favouring one and implicitly or explicitly demoting the other. Ultimately they become in effect Vaiṣṇava works, but Śaiva elements are by no means absent and, as the evidence presented above suggests, the relationship between them is highly complex. At the same time Indra particularly but also to some extent Brahmā suffer a decline in prestige. Instead of Indra's martial exploits being stressed, his killing of Vṛtra is seen as brāhmaṇa-murder and the story of his adultery with Ahalyā is referred to or narrated in later parts of both epics (Mbh. 5.12.6 and 12.329.14,1–2, Rām. 1.47–48 and 7.30.15–41), somewhat as in the later formalised stages of classical mythology Zeus and Jupiter become notorious for their affairs. In the same way Brahmā's creative activity is trivialised into a readiness to grant boons to all and sundry regardless of the consequences. A pivotal role in this change has no doubt been played by the *Bhagavadgītā*, which will be examined in greater detail later in this chapter.

Kṛṣṇa

The historical character of Vāsudeva, as the son of Vasudeva of the Vṛṣni (or Sātvata) sept of the Yādava clan, is at least possible, for the important role played by the clan and the great achievements of Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa in the epics and Purāṇas lend some support to it. This hero of the Yādava clan, who became the leader of a religious

movement, was deified and styled Bhagavat. To move outside the epics themselves briefly, it is appropriate to note that there is a little other textual evidence for the origins of the Bhāgavata movement. One or two references to a Kṛṣṇa in Vedic literature should probably be discounted, since there is nothing really to connect them with the Kṛṣṇa of later worship.⁴⁷ The earliest probable reference is in Pāṇini (5th–4th century B.C.), who prescribes the formation of the word Vāsudevaka in the sense of a person whose object of devotion is Vāsudeva or Arjuna.⁴⁸ Dandekar suggests that the identification of Vāsudeva with Kṛṣṇa is the result of close ties between the Vṛṣnis and the Yādavas in the period after Pāṇini, and accepts that the cowherd aspect of Kṛṣṇa derives from Ābhīra culture.⁴⁹ However, the clearest and most closely datable mention is by the Greek ambassador to the Mauryan court, Megasthenes, at the end of the 4th century B.C., who records that the Sourasenoi (i.e. the people of the Mathurā area) held Heracles in special honour, since Heracles would be the nearest Greek equivalent to Kṛṣṇa.⁵⁰ The Bhāgavata movement, originating thus with the Yādava peoples of the Mathurā region, afterwards spread to western India, the northern Deccan and other regions. If the Kṛṣṇa, son of Devakī, mentioned in the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* as the pupil of the ṛṣi Ghora of the Āṅgirasa clan, is to be connected with this cult, then it was possibly a development of Sun-worship, for both Kṛṣṇa Devakīputra and his teacher were worshippers of the sun.⁵¹ *Bhagavadgītā* 4.1 states that the doctrine was taught by the Lord to Vivasvat (a solar deity), by him to Manu, and by Manu to Ikṣvāku, while the *Nārāyaṇīya* says that the *Sātvata vidhi* (another name for the Bhāgavata doctrine, after the tribe responsible

⁴⁷ Cf. S. K. De 1942.

⁴⁸ 4.3.98; however, this *sūtra* is part of the group 95–100 whose heading is *bhakti* and give the suffixes -ka etc. with the meaning of one who has *bhakti* towards the items named: inanimate objects, *mahārāja*, Vāsudeva and Arjuna, *gotra* and *ksatriya* names, and names of countries. Thus *bhakti* here means preference for or addiction to.

⁴⁹ Dandekar 1975–76.

⁵⁰ Megasthenes' remark is recorded by Arrian, *Indica* 7–8.

⁵¹ *Chāndogya Up.* 3.17.6–7 read: 'Then Ghora Āṅgirasa, after communicating this to Kṛṣṇa, the son of Devakī, also said, as he had become free from desire, 'In the final hour, one should take refuge in these three (thoughts). You are the indestructible, you are the unshaken, you are the very essence of life.' On this point there are these two verses: Proceeding from the primeval seed, they see the morning light that shines higher than the sky. Seeing beyond darkness, the higher light, seeing the higher light, we attain to the sun god among the gods, the highest light, yes, the highest light.' This may be compared with *Bhagavadgītā* 8.5+10.

for its introduction) was laid down in ancient times by the Sun (12.322.19ab), but it is doubtful whether these passages link in any way with that in the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*.

In the *Mahābhārata*, Kṛṣṇa appears in a dual role as a prince who acts as counsellor to the Pāṇḍavas and as the supreme personal deity who suddenly reveals himself to Arjuna within the *Bhagavadgītā*. In the first role, he is a chief of the Yādavas of Dvārakā, siding with the Pāṇḍavas and acting as their adviser in the battle against the Kurus, especially perhaps in the preparations for war (for example in 5.30 and 5.71). He dispels Yudhiṣṭhīra's hesitations about the rightness of violence, emphasising that Duryodhana must be confronted in battle, and upbraids Bhīma for his unmanliness (5.73.17–18); he appears, in fact, as one of the strongest protagonists of conflict, since his peace embassy is aimed more at strengthening Yudhiṣṭhīra's resolve than dissuading the already committed Duryodhana.⁵² His advice is indeed frequently cunning to the point of unscrupulousness; this amorality appeared incongruous with his later assumption of the role of a personal god and with the inclusion of the *Bhagavadgītā* in the epic it was felt necessary to include verses justifying the advice and the decisions based on it. There are problems too for Kṛṣṇa's divinity, or more exactly Arjuna's lack of prior awareness of it, in the *Bhagavadgītā*'s relationship to other episodes where he is revealed as divine, such as Draupadī's prayer to him before her attempted disrobing at the *sabhā* (Mbh. 2.535*) or that earlier theophany in which he reveals himself to Duryodhana (Mbh. 5.129.1–15).⁵³ On the first of these examples Madhav Deshpande concludes: 'The best answer to such a dilemma is provided by the fact that the critical edition of the *Mahābhārata* does not contain this episode, indicating that it must be a later addition to the epic. Thus, it seems likely that elements of Kṛṣṇa religion were added initially in ways which would keep the logical progression of the *Mahābhārata* story unimpaired. However, in later times, this process of adding elements of Kṛṣṇa religion continued past a

⁵² Interestingly, after the battle Kṛṣṇa is asked by the sage Uttanika whether he was able to maintain peace among the opposing factions and replies that he could not prevent war breaking out. Uttanika's response is disbelieving, since he declares that, if Kṛṣṇa had wished it, the outcome could have been different (14.22).

⁵³ Winteritz long ago (1916) demonstrated that the story of Draupadī being reclothed by Kṛṣṇa as Duḥśāsana tries to strip her is a later interpolation, noting not only the incongruity otherwise of Bhīma's vow but also the unique vocabulary: *gopijanapriya*, *ramānātha* and *vrajanātha*, and adducing its absence from Bhāsa's *Dūtavākyā*. On the second episode, see Otto 1934b and Hiltzebeitel 1976b: 120–28 and 139.

point of maintaining the integrity of the plot of the *Mahābhārata*.⁵⁴

There is little connection between the passages where he appears as a prince and those where he appears as a god; after his self-revelation in the *Bhagavadgītā*, he continues to be treated as a human ally rather than a deity. Sporadically, there are indeed allusions to his divinity—Dhṛtarāṣṭra, for example, considers the Vṛṣṇi hero to be the eternal Viṣṇu (5.22.31) and Karṇa before his duel with Arjuna sees him as the creator (*kṛṣṇā ca sraṣṭā jagataḥ*, 8.22.49a)—but mostly these are incidental in narrative terms to the main story.⁵⁵ Schneider has studied Kṛṣṇa's transformation, as he sees it, from a human hero to the god of the *bhakti* movement.⁵⁶ The oldest layer is that of Kṛṣṇa as a human hero, which has as an important element the theme of Kṛṣṇa's invulnerability (and the brāhmaṇised aspect of it in the Durvāsas episode of 13.144), and with this has been incorporated a much younger Kṛṣṇa legend centring around the Jarāsaṃdha episode (which is extraneous to the plot of the *Mahābhārata*) by the device of Śiśupāla's questions at Yudhiṣṭhīra's *rājasūya*; Schneider then dates this by its assumed historical basis, the final attempts by western tribal communities to resist domination by Magadha, to the 4th century B.C.

The legends concerning Kṛṣṇa in fact show three main aspects: firstly, as in the *Mahābhārata*, he is a warrior, the ruler of Dvārakā, and perhaps an ancient martial hero of the west, later deified; secondly, he is Kṛṣṇa Gopāla, the deified hero of the nomadic or semi-nomadic pastoral tribes located in the territory of the Śūrasenas, on either bank of the river Yamunā, whose life is narrated in the *Harivamśa* and who ultimately is associated with love in all its forms (in which aspect the stories of his dalliance with the cowgirls come to be very prominent); and thirdly, he is the supreme personal deity of later Vaiṣṇavism, for which the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* is the central text.⁵⁷ Although the first connected account of Kṛṣṇa's life is found in the *Harivamśa*, the *Mahābhārata* itself does give some background, beyond just the episodes in which he participates as an ally of the Pāṇḍavas, and shows some awareness of Kṛṣṇa's childhood as a cowherd.⁵⁸ There

⁵⁴ Deshpande 1991: 348.

⁵⁵ However, Hiltebeitel argues otherwise (1984–85: 9). So too, less ably, does Burt Michael Thorp (1986).

⁵⁶ Schneider 1982.

⁵⁷ Cf. Charlotte Vaudeville (1968). Alf Hiltebeitel (1979) provides a valuable historical overview.

⁵⁸ A very different aspect to Kṛṣṇa as a child comes from his identification with Nārāyaṇa, which occurs already in Mārkandeya's vision of the *pralaya* where he sees

is very little on his early life but there are brief allusions—whether based on parallel oral traditions or later expansions—to be found in the text. Kṛṣṇa himself at one point refers incidentally to his killing of Kamṣa (2.13.33, with similar brief allusions at 2.55.6–7, 5.126.36–39 and 7.10.6–7), while Śiśupāla in his contemptuous remarks about Kṛṣṇa refers to him as the killer of Pūtanā and as a cowherd, who killed a vulture, a horse and a bull (i.e. Pūtanā, Keśin and Ariṣṭa), overturned a wooden cart and held up Mount Govardhana for seven days (2.38.4–9); two of these exploits, the killing of Pūtanā and the lifting of Govardhana for the sake of the cattle, are referred to again at a later point by Vidura (5.128.45), while Dhṛtarāṣṭra declares that Kṛṣṇa was brought up in a cowherd family, killed a horse near the Yamunā and also a demon in the form of a bull (7.10.2–4).⁵⁹ There are just a few other traces of Kṛṣṇa's pastoral background: Subhadrā, when first introduced to Draupadī, removes the clothes of a princess to appear humbly dressed as a *gopālikā* (1.213.17),⁶⁰ and Kṛṣṇa declares that he has a large multitude of cowherds (*gopas*, 5.7.16; cf. 2.38.4–9 and 5.128.45–6), while less directly Kṛṣṇa's troops who fight for the Kauravas are described as *gokule nityasamvṛddhāḥ* (8.4.38a), but there is absolutely no mention of Kṛṣṇa's adventures with the *gopīs* (except at 2.543*: *gopījanapriya*).⁶¹ The end of his life is, however, given more fully in the *Mausala-parvan*, set 36 years after the war. It starts when 500,000 Vṛṣṇi warriors, impelled by fate and curses, kill one another in a drunken brawl. The immediate cause of the quarrel is an argument over deceit in the war between Sātyaki, who had fought for the Pāṇḍavas, and Kṛtavarman, who had fought for the Kauravas;

Nārāyaṇa in the form of a child sitting on the branches of a tree in the midst of the waters and at the end explicitly identifies the deity to Yudhiṣṭhira as his ally Kṛṣṇa Vārsneya (Mbh. 3.186–187). However, this is clearly a particularly late passage, younger than the *Nārāyanīya* or at least of the same period.

⁵⁹ Another reference to the pastoral background comes when Kṛṣṇa's army, the Nārāyaṇa Gopas who are assigned to the Kauravas (5.7.10–20), is described as being from Gokula (8.4.38a). There are also instances of the epithets *keśihantṛ* (e.g. 2.36.2a), *keśiśūdana* (e.g. 2.30.11d) or *keśiniśūdana* (e.g. 6.40.1d). Finally, there is Kṛṣṇa's title Govinda but it is notable how much more frequent this is in the *Āśvamedhikā-parvan* than elsewhere.

⁶⁰ As part of her dowry, Kṛṣṇa presents the Pāṇḍavas with ten thousand cows from the Mathurā area but, since he also presents a thousand chariots, a thousand mares, a thousand mules, a thousand female servants, ten loads of gold and a thousand elephants, this is not significant (1.213.40–51). For arguments in favour of Subhadrā's dressing as a *gopālikā* being symbolic, see Hiltebeitel 1988–91: I, 220.

⁶¹ For discussion of this evidence see S. L. Katre 1960; Biardeau 1968–78: V, 204–237; and Hiltebeitel 1989.

the first insult is hurled and the first blow struck by Sātyaki, Arjuna's disciple. Baladeva and Kṛṣṇa both die and Dvārakā is engulfed by the ocean.

Primarily Kṛṣṇa's family ties on his father's side are with the Vṛṣnis of Mathurā and in the *Mahābhārata* he is the son of Vasudeva, king of the Vṛṣnis. The Vṛṣnis are already known in the later Vedic period; Pāṇini (6.2.34) cites the Vṛṣnis and Andhakas (with whom they were allied to form a branch of the Yādava clan) as *kṣatriya* names; and in the *Mahābhārata* they control Mathurā (for example, 2.13.29–30, 44, 5.126.36ff.). Vāsudeva Kṛṣṇa is considered the protector of the Vṛṣnis and called Vārṣneya in the *Mahābhārata*. The name Mādhava, so often later used specifically of Kṛṣṇa, is also used of other Yādavas or Vṛṣnis in the *Mahābhārata*, for example of Vasudeva (e.g. 16.7.15d), Balarāma (e.g. 9.36.9b, 13d) and Kṛtavarman (e.g. 9.20.24d). Although ultimately Vāsudeva Kṛṣṇa alone is regarded as the founder of the new cult, several other members of his family originally shared the honour of deification with him. However, the other family members are not mentioned in the *Bhagavadgītā*, any more than Nara and Nārāyaṇa, nor is any of them except Balarāma at all prominent in the rest of the *Mahābhārata*. But in a late addition to the *Mahābhārata* (14.176* 1–2), Govinda, Baladeva and the other Vṛṣni heroes (*tathānyān vṛṣṇivīraṁś ca*, 2 pr.) are mentioned together. The five Vṛṣni heroes (Samkarṣaṇa, Vāsudeva, Pradyumna, Aniruddha and Sāmba) probably belonged to a line of local kings whose historical character was transformed into myth as they were gradually deified. In Pāñcarātra theology the first four are regarded as emanations (*vyūha*) of Nārāyaṇa, while dynastically the last three are descendants of Kṛṣṇa Vāsudeva.

One of Samkarṣaṇa's main features is his association with agriculture, shown by his name and emphasised by his titles Halāyudha and Musalin, and he may originally have been a non-brāhmaṇical agricultural deity, who was identified with Baladeva of the Vṛṣnis before the 2nd century B.C. This identification led to the linking of his cult with that of Vāsudeva, which in course of time completely dominated and absorbed it. He appears in the *Mahābhārata* as a warrior of the Vṛṣnis, the son of Vasudeva and Rohinī, but in a very minor role. His cult shows many features of snake-worship: a late *Mahābhārata* passage (13 App. I.14.488–94) speaks of a serpent Baladeva, the foremost of the *nāgas*, who should be worshipped on the eighth of the dark half of Kārttika to obtain the strength of the boar *avatāra*. He is also regarded as an incarnation of Śeṣa and at his death a snake

came out of his mouth (16.5.12–13, cf. *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* 5.37.54–5). However, the *Nārāyaṇīya* in its sixth chapter, where Nārāyaṇa declares to Nārada the forms in which he will become incarnate (a Purāṇic future), recites a number of episodes relating to Balarāma and by implication makes him an *avatāra* alongside the other two Rāmas.

D. D. Kosambi argues from the nature of the Govardhana myth that the cult of Kṛṣṇa reflects the change from a pastoral culture, in which sacrifices were offered to Indra, to a settled agricultural one. Saṃkarṣaṇa ('the ploughman'), closely associated with the Nāgas, was the main deity of the agriculturalists, while underlying the worship of Kṛṣṇa Vāsudeva and Saṃkarṣaṇa there seems to be 'some alliance between the Yadus and the other tribes, combined with a westward scattering of the tribesmen from Mathurā, supposedly in flight to escape an invasion from Magadha, which lay to the east'.⁶² Although the myth is quite probably based on some kind of change in the nature of the Govardhana cult, it contains no direct evidence that it was Indra who was worshipped in conjunction with the mountain. What it, along with early iconographic material and the ancient festival of the *Govardhanapūjā*, does suggest is that for a long time Kṛṣṇa Gopāla was merely a minor deity, the great *yakṣa* of Mount Govardhana, protector of the herdsmen located in the region of Mathurā. He was associated with, and probably originally subordinate to, the god with the plough, Saṃkarṣaṇa, Halāyudha or Balarāma, the great *nāga* whose younger brother he is considered to be. The oldest references to the cult of Vāsudeva and Baladeva, such as we find in Patañjali's *Mahābhāṣya* and the Pāli Buddhist canon, confirm the connection of these two deities with the pre-Buddhist cult of Nāgas and Yakṣas.⁶³ Whereas Baladeva is white in colour 'like a cloud empty of rain', Kṛṣṇa is dark in colour like a rain-cloud, the river Yamunā or the ocean, and is born in the middle of the rainy season. Black is the colour of the Kali Yuga, the beginning of which is marked by Kṛṣṇa's death according to later, Purāṇic traditions, and in the *Mahābhārata* it is stated that black is Kṛṣṇa's colour for the Kali Yuga alone, since he had assumed the colours white, red and yellow in the preceding Yugas (*śukla*, *rakta*, *pīta*, *kṛṣṇa*, Mbh. 3.148.5–37, but cf. 3.187.31, reversing the middle pair) as Nārāyaṇa, Acyuta, Viṣṇu and Keśava. The implication seems to be that Kṛṣṇa's blackness is a sign of the times, of the onset of the Kaliyuga.

⁶² Kosambi 1965: 117–18.

⁶³ See for example R. G. Bhandarkar (1874).

Another perspective on his name is that provided by Hiltebeitel in his explorations of all the epic characters who are called Kṛṣṇa.⁶⁴ He argues that the narrative images of the *Mahābhārata* have been used by its authors as a tool to work out various theological and soteriological issues raised by the Upaniṣads in *bhakti* terms. He points in particular to one epic image, that of the chariot, already used as the basis of an allegory in the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* (1.3.9–11, echoed for example at Mbh. 11.7.13–20 and 14.50.1–6), and its specific form of Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna on their single chariot, when they are frequently referred to as the two Kṛṣṇas. In part this is the reflex of their identification as Nara and Nārāyaṇa, which will be discussed more fully in a later section of this chapter, but, as Hiltebeitel emphasises, it also relates to their being incarnations of Indra and Viṣṇu and to pairings of epithets referring to them (such as Guḍākeśa and Hṛṣīkeśa, Viṣṇu and Jīṣṇu). References to the two Kṛṣṇas preponderate in the four battle books (85% of the total according to Hiltebeitel), especially in the *Kaṁparavān*, and the remainder come from scenes of combat in previous books, such as the killing of Jarāsamṛdha. Hiltebeitel stresses the contrasts between Karṇa and Śalya as his charioteer in their divisiveness and Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa in their essential unity, as well as drawing attention to the roles of Brahmā and Śiva in the myth of the burning of Tripura, which he sees as the background myth within the *Kaṁparavān* (noting the identification at 8.12.15–16 of Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna with Brahmā and Īśāna, as well as Nara and Nārāyaṇa). However, it is not only Arjuna who is also called Kṛṣṇa; indeed, Draupadī and Vyāsa are more commonly so designated. As Hiltebeitel observes, they have theological affinities with the goddess and with Brahmā respectively and he suggests that in the linking of Kṛṣṇa and Draupadī in this way, besides the complexities of their identities as Viṣṇu and Śrī, there is implied ‘the destructive implications of a union between the dark and fiery (fire-born) Draupadī as a form of the Goddess, and the yogic and ascetic prowess of Arjuna as a multiform of Śiva’.⁶⁵ He also sees as central to their designation as Kṛṣṇā/Kṛṣṇa the episode of Duryodhana dragging Draupadī by her black hair into the assembly hall and her vow to see Duryodhana’s dark arm cut off. Hiltebeitel also argues that there are many scenes where the interaction between Kṛṣṇa, Arjuna and Draupadī is central but acknowledges that ‘there are only a few instances where the

⁶⁴ Hiltebeitel 1984–85 and 1985.

⁶⁵ Hiltebeitel 1985: 72 (repr. 103).

epic poets play upon this interplay in terms of their “dark” names.⁶⁶

Bimal Krishna Matilal is the most recent scholar to have taken up another striking feature of Kṛṣṇa’s portrayal, the issue of his deviousness, as it seems, in so much of the narrative of the *Mahābhārata*.⁶⁷ He points out that it is not only Western scholars who have had problems with this ‘devious diplomat’, since the Jains and Buddhists were also highly critical of Kṛṣṇa’s ethics and even the *Mahābhārata* supplies a list of his supposed misdeeds in the form of Duryodhana’s dying accusation when he was felled by Bhīma after a foul blow with his mace (his advice to put Śikhaṇḍin in front of Arjuna in order to kill Bhīṣma, persuading Yudhiṣṭhīra to utter the lie which led to Drona’s death, urging Arjuna to kill Karṇa when his chariot-wheel was stuck, and getting Sātyaki to kill the already incapacitated Bhūriśravas). Matilal takes issue with those who wish to interpret the *Mahābhārata* battle as an allegory of the battle between good and evil and affirms that what the epic emphasises repeatedly is the elusiveness and ambiguity of the concept of *dharma*, while also noting the moral defects on the Kaurava side, such as Drona’s role in the death of Abhimanyu and long before the war his atrocious behaviour towards his other pupil Ekalavya, as well as unpardonable humiliation inflicted on Draupadī by Duryodhana. He points out that Kṛṣṇa’s concern about the outcome of the battle and his planning to give the Pāṇḍavas the advantage are not the behaviour of an omnipotent deity and that, ‘apart from certain inspired speeches (e.g. in the *Gītā*) he acknowledged his human limitations’ but also argues that ‘omnipotence is not an important concept in Indian philosophy of religion’ and so the problem of evil is less significant.⁶⁸ Thus, since Kṛṣṇa was not omnipotent, he had to resort to strategies (or stratagems) and to evolve a new situational ethic in order to ensure that the Pāṇḍava side, which was the weaker by comparison with the Kauravas, should gain the victory that the moral balance indicated should be theirs. If Matilal’s ideas are to be taken seriously, as surely they should be, the concept of *dharma* in the *Mahābhārata* gains a far deeper dimension.

Kṛṣṇa’s slaying of Kāṁsa is referred to by Patañjali,⁶⁹ which suggests that it was well known in the 2nd century B.C., and it was tradition-

⁶⁶ Hiltebeitel 1985: 73 (repr. 106).

⁶⁷ Matilal 1991.

⁶⁸ Matilal 1991: 410.

⁶⁹ *Mahābhāṣya* 3.1.26 and 3.2.111.

ally enacted at Mathurā, according to A. W. Entwistle, who suggests that it may have taken the form of a dramatic performance, since an inscription of the 1st or 2nd century A.D. records that there were actors in Mathurā, which had probably been a centre of drama long before then.⁷⁰ Mathurā is referred to in Sanskrit literature as having been formerly the capital of the Śaurasenas, the original home of the Yādavas, and the area inhabited by two of their clans, the Andhakas and the Vṛṣnis, before they were forced to leave by Jarāsamdha, the ruler of Magadha, which may imply that the myth reflects the pre-Mauryan history of Mathurā.

The only pastoral tribe known historically to have roamed around Braj in this early period are the Ābhīras, who are first recorded as living in Sind, Panjab and Rajasthan, while a branch is said to have lived in Matsya, the region that included Mathurā. Some Ābhīras are known to have held responsible positions under the Śaka satraps in Western India, but thereafter they seem gradually to have declined into scattered communities of backward forest people. In literature they are referred to as cowherds (*gopa*, *gopāla*, *gvāla*) and their settlements as a *ghoṣa*, a term equivalent to *vraja*. But Sanskrit texts nowhere indicate that Nanda and his community were Ābhīras, although vernacular writers, such as Raskhān, sometimes refer to them as Ahīrs, their modern descendants. It is possible that classical mythology reflects the adoption by the Ābhīras of the Kṛṣṇa cult, or even the assimilation of one of their heroes or deities, but did not name them because of their low status. It is more likely, however, that their culture served as the basis for some of the pastoral and rustic elements in the earliest stories of Kṛṣṇa's childhood, since they inhabited the area of Mathurā at the time when these myths developed.⁷¹ If so, it would have been about the beginning of the Christian era, or a little earlier, that the cult of the Ābhīra god was absorbed into the Vāsudeva cult and the identification of Kṛṣṇa with the Ābhīra god could have been partly responsible for the introduction of such erotic elements in the Kṛṣṇa legend as his amorous dalliance with the *gopīs*. The fusion of Kṛṣṇa with the Ābhīra god would have been made possible by the cultural similarity between them.⁷²

Vaudeville has suggested that the Kṛṣṇa Gopāla cycle originated

⁷⁰ Entwistle 1987: 117.

⁷¹ Cf. Entwistle 1987: 117–8.

⁷² Some further comment on this point will be found in the next chapter, on the *Harivamśa*.

in a Śākta context that was eventually outgrown.⁷³ Having argued for the northern, pastoral origin of Kṛṣṇa Gopāla in Gupta times on iconographic, textual (*Mahābhārata* and *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*) and ethnographic grounds, Vaudeville asserts that devotion to Kṛṣṇa did not really flourish in north India until after Caitanya in the 15th century. She notes that nothing suggests that the Ābhīras and other pastoral tribes were Vaiṣṇava but that, like most lower castes, they recognised the Goddess as supreme deity.⁷⁴ Early references to Kṛṣṇa Gopāla seem more concerned with the literary, poetic potential of the story than with its religious significance. Vaudeville also claims a remarkable thematic parallelism, particularly in their myths of origin, between the two dancing gods, Kṛṣṇa and Skanda, and suggests that Kṛṣṇa may have borrowed much from Skanda. Since Skanda's links with the Goddess are incontestable, it may well be that such a process was facilitated by the fact that both Kṛṣṇa and Skanda bear a relationship to her.

Some evidence for the earliest phases and for Kṛṣṇa sharing the honour of deification with Saṃkarṣaṇa is provided from other sources. An inscription at Besnagar (ancient Vidiśā) records the erection of a *garudadhwaja* in honour of Vāsudeva, the *devadeva*, by Heliodorus 'a Bhāgavata, the son of Diya [Dion], and an inhabitant of Takṣaśilā, who came as Greek ambassador'; this inscription also records one of the tenets of the cult: 'three immortal precepts, *dama*, *tyāga* and *apramāda*, when they are well practised in this life lead to heaven' (Mbh. 11.7.19). Another inscription from Besnagar marks the erection of the *garudadhwaja* of an excellent temple (*prāśādottama*) of the Bhagavat in the twelfth regnal year of a King Bhāgavata, identified with the last but one Śuṅga king. The discovery in Afghanistan of a new type of drachma of the Indo-Greek ruler Agathocles (c. 180–165 B.C.), showing on one side the figure of Kṛṣṇa and on the other side Saṃkarṣaṇa, would push back the earliest attestation quite substantially from these two inscriptions (which both belong around 100 B.C.).⁷⁵ Two inscriptions from around the beginning of the Christian era also indicate that no sharp distinction was made between followers of Vedic ritual practices and devotees of the Vṛṣṇi

⁷³ Vaudeville 1968.

⁷⁴ She suggests that the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* preserves vestiges of this link between Kṛṣṇa Gopāla and the Goddess, for when Kṛṣṇa steals the clothes of the *gopīs*, it is after they have been worshipping Kātyāyāni.

⁷⁵ See Filliozat 1973.

heroes: the Nānāghāṭ inscription begins with an invocation to several gods, including Saṃkarṣaṇa and Vāsudeva, and then continues by describing the amounts of sacrificial fees the donor paid to the priests who performed a number of Vedic sacrifices, while the Ghosūndī (Rājasthān) inscription shows that a Vedic *aśvamedha* was performed in honour of Saṃkarṣaṇa and Vāsudeva.⁷⁶

The Bhagavadgītā

By its inclusion in the *Mahābhārata*, the *Bhagavadgītā* clearly falls outside Vedic literature, though called an *Upaniṣad* in the colophons to its *adhyāyas*, and so it can claim no inherent authority. Its inclusion at the heart of the *Mahābhārata* nevertheless provides its strength, for it makes it available to all, while Kṛṣṇa is answering a real-life dilemma for Arjuna and thereby propounding a view of life and a way to liberation with which to a large extent the ordinary man in the street can identify. In its setting in the *Bhīṣmaparvan*, the *Bhagavadgītā* appears to form a component of the narrative rather than merely an intrusion, but its relationship to the *Mahābhārata* and its consistency have both been subject to debate, with a strong tendency in the past to dissect the text, from von Humboldt onwards but particularly by Otto and Jacobi. Jacobi considered the *Bhagavadgītā* to be a later elaboration of the few verses which originally contained Kṛṣṇa's answer to Arjuna; he isolated this original form as 1.1–2.37 (apart from 2.7–8) and 18.73.⁷⁷ Otto's original *Gītā* comprised ch. 1, 2.1–13, 20, 22, 29–37, 10.1–8, 11.1–6, 8–12, 14, 17, 19–36, 41–51 and 18.58–61, 66, 72, 73; this Ur-Text was expanded by eight doctrinal treatises ('Lehrtraktate'), each dealing with a specific doctrine and claiming the authority of Kṛṣṇa as deity.⁷⁸ Incidentally, in the same year as Jacobi's work, J. W. Hauer published a study of the *Bhagavadgītā*, concentrating more on its 'heroic' setting of conflict than on its metaphysics (and revealing the influence of contemporary politics).⁷⁹ Subsequently, Morton Smith attempted by statistical analysis to show that each of three sections is probably by a different author; the

⁷⁶ For further discussion of these last two inscriptions see the end of the section on Nārāyaṇa and the Pañcarātra in this chapter.

⁷⁷ Jacobi 1918.

⁷⁸ Otto 1934b and 1935.

⁷⁹ Hauer 1934.

three sections are ch. 1–12 plus 18.55–78, ch. 13–16 and 17.1–18.54, and he also suspected that 2.19–20, 28–29 and 3.23cd were interpolated and that chapter 10 had been modified.⁸⁰

Some Indian scholars have criticised Western scholars for what they see as their excessive readiness to dissect. However, this tendency is not confined to Western scholars, as is shown for example by the work of G. S. Khair, in which he concludes that the *Bhagavadgītā* was composed by three ‘philosopher-poets’ at three different periods: the first, before the 6th century B.C., composed parts of the first six chapters and propounded a theory of Yoga and *karma*; the second, about a century later, added the major part of chapters 8, 13–15 and 17–18 and incorporated the Sāṃkhya metaphysics; the third, by about the 3rd century B.C. recast the whole poem, composing six new chapters (7, 9–12 and 16) and inserting new material in the rest in order to introduce ‘devotional theism based on the worship of Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa’.⁸¹ More recently M. R. Yardi applied statistical methods to the *śloka* metre to determine authorship and concludes that ‘The *Gītā* is undoubtedly the work of a single author’, whom he identifies as Sauti, the third in his series of five authors of the epic.⁸²

On the other hand, some Western scholars have defended the unity of the *Bhagavadgītā* and argued that it is integral to the *Mahābhārata*. The most notable is Paul Oltramare, who claimed that the *Bhagavadgītā* is there to justify the conduct of the Pāṇḍavas and to enable the *Mahābhārata* to satisfy the requirements of brāhmaṇical morals.⁸³ As part of his rejection of the possibility that the present text had replaced an original simpler text, he argued that it succeeds in its aim of justifying the heroes’ conduct, showing its consistency with Vedic and other schools and opposing those who rejected orthodoxy; hence it is inappropriate to see it as an insertion. Specifically he argued that Kṛṣṇa’s instruction is directed precisely at Arjuna’s situation, while accepting in effect as its corollary that the text contains views that are logically irreconcilable.⁸⁴ Although the details of his argument

⁸⁰ Smith 1968; he counted the ratios of declined stems, of nominal compounds and of particles to lines.

⁸¹ Khair 1969.

⁸² Yardi 1991: 5.

⁸³ Oltramare 1928; cf. also Oltramare 1925 where he sees the *Mahābhārata* as witnessing to the struggle between the older philosophical ideas, found in the early Upaniṣads and in the orthodox systems, and the sectarian spirit of devotion, and regards it as centring on the theme of *dharma*.

⁸⁴ ‘Mais si la Bhagavad-Gītā n'est proprement l'exposé ni du Vedānta, ni du

are open to question, he has presented rather clearly the two views that are in practice tenable about the *Bhagavadgītā*: either it is an integral part of the *Mahābhārata* and directed pragmatically to Arjuna's situation, or it is a later insertion (which includes the possibility of a later expansion of a brief original) developing a philosophically and theologically significant message from its *Mahābhārata* context.⁸⁵ R. C. Zaehner also adopted a relatively unitary approach in his translation, but his main concern in any case was to make clear its overall religious and philosophical teachings.⁸⁶ A recent exponent is Joanna Sachse, who argues basically that the author or redactor gave his yoga ideas a brahmanic flavour by introducing the teaching concerning sacrifice, which readers who did not understand the metaphor involved could take literally.⁸⁷

In a more sophisticated analysis than others to date, Mislav Ježić has drawn attention to the repetitions of both meaning and expression in the text, arguing that these help to reveal its structure.⁸⁸ He makes a distinction between 'continuity repetitions', such as those found in questions and answers (which clearly belong within a given text sequence) and 'duplication repetitions', which repeat something while giving it a fresh slant (and thus indicate parts belonging to different sequences, since they indicate a later reworking). On this basis he distinguishes an epic part of the poem ending at 2.37 (and continued from Mbh. 6.41.1 but containing an inserted didactic layer at 2.11–30), which then received Yogic and Upaniṣadic enlargements (the first Yoga layer consisting of 2.39–4.42, with certain exceptions), an originally separate hymn in *adhyāya* 11 (and also 2.5–8), and finally a *bhakti* layer which completely reinterprets the earlier layers and synthesises them. The Sāṃkhya and Yoga layers precede the Vedāntic elements but the *bhakti* layer definitely comes last. It is certainly clear

Sāṅkhya, ni du Bhaktimārga, si elle est ce qu'elle prétend être, une justification du dharma, et tout particulièrement du dharma des kṣatriyas, tous ces philosophèmes n'ont plus qu'une valeur secondaire; ils ne sont pas là pour eux, mais servent à la démonstration de la thèse principale. . . . la Bhagavad-Gītā aussi accepte et même soutient des dogmes logiquement inconciliables, pourvu que les obligations de la caste soient maintenues et respectées' (Oltramare 1928: 180).

⁸⁵ The suggestion put forward by Milton Eder (1988: 41) of approaching the text 'as a collection of arguments, arguments encased within chapters which are internally consistent without concern for statements taken from different parts of the text' does not basically affect this argument.

⁸⁶ *Bhagavadgītā* 1969.

⁸⁷ Sachse 1988.

⁸⁸ Ježić 1986 and 1979.

that the *Bhagavadgītā* blends, no doubt deliberately, teachings deriving from several sources in order to provide a synthesis acceptable to a wide audience.⁸⁹

The arguments for thinking that the *Bhagavadgītā* was not originally part of the *Mahābhārata* include the incongruity of such a sermon at this point in the narrative. It is most implausible that both armies would really have postponed hostilities while Kṛṣṇa answers Arjuna's doubts at such length (especially since there are indications that the battle has actually begun: *pravṛtte śastrasampāte*, BhG. 1.20c). The counter-argument that the *Mahābhārata* is not history but dramatic narrative merely weakens the argument slightly rather than negates it entirely. The contrast between Kṛṣṇa's revelation of himself as the supreme deity and Arjuna's casual familiarity with him in the rest of the epic is another argument for the view that the *Bhagavadgītā* is not an original part of the *Mahābhārata*. In addition, the supposed repetition of his teaching that Kṛṣṇa gives to Arjuna after the battle is a significant pointer in assessing the relationship of the *Bhagavadgītā* to its epic context, for the *Anugītā* (Mbh. 14.16–50) in fact propounds an appreciably different doctrine, with a strong emphasis on the performance of austerities. Incidentally, whereas the slightly older *Mahānārāyaṇa Upaniṣad* makes Nārāyaṇa its supreme being, in the *Bhagavadgītā* Kṛṣṇa presents himself as the supreme, identical to or more often superior to Brahman; Viṣṇu's name occurs just three times in the *Bhagavadgītā*: once when Kṛṣṇa declares that he is Viṣṇu among the Ādityas at 10.21a (but Indra among the gods in the next verse, 10.22b) and twice in the vocative, at 11.24d and 30d,⁹⁰ while the name Hari is found only at 11.9b and 18.77b.

⁸⁹ Probably too ambitiously Richard V. De Smet (1975) affirms that the *Bhagavadgītā* blends elements from nine traditions: ritualistic Brahmanism, Upaniṣadic doctrines, early Sāṅkhya, Yoga, Śaivism, the Nārāyaṇa-Viṣṇu cult, the Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa cult, Jainism and Buddhism. We may, however, note the use of Mīmāṃsā vocabulary (*adhikāra* at 2.47a and, less distinctively, *pātra* and *apātra* at 17.20c and 22b, and *samkalpa* at 4.19b, 6.2c, 4c, 24a), as well as other terms from the ritual tradition (e.g. *purodhās* at 10.24a). More philosophical terms include *adhibhūta* at 8.4b and *adhibhūta* at 7.30a and 8.1a, 4a, as well as the frequent *adhyātma* (3.30d, 7.29d, 8.1a, 3b, 10.32c, 11.1b, 13.11a and 15.5a).

⁹⁰ Final vocatives such as these are, of course, prime examples of '*pāda*-fillers' which have no essential connection with the rest of the verse and can easily be substituted one for another. Two other epithets used of Kṛṣṇa in the *Bhagavadgītā* are Madhusūdana at 1.35b, 2.1d, 4b, 6.33b and 8.2b (all except the occurrence at 2.1d in the vocative) and Janārdana at 1.36b, 39d, 44b, 3.1b, 10.18b and 11.51d; both are used elsewhere in the *Mahābhārata* and in later texts still to refer to Viṣṇu as well as to Kṛṣṇa. However, the existence of an Asura named Madhu, whose son

Another argument sometimes used to prove that the *Bhagavadgītā* is integral to the *Mahābhārata* is based on the number of parallels between it and other parts of the epic, with the implicit or explicit assumption that these are quotations from the *Bhagavadgītā*.⁹¹ The situation is in fact more complex: in two instances the *Bhagavadgītā* seems clearly to be borrowing from elsewhere in the *Mahābhārata*, in many more the issue is not clear cut, and there is always the possibility of borrowing from a common source. Often the verses or single lines are not particularly memorable and the identity or close similarity may owe more to the common subject matter than to any specific quoting in either direction.⁹² Weaker still are arguments drawn on a structural basis from, for example, the episode of Śalya acting as Karṇa's charioteer, seen as a kind of inversion, with Śalya's insults a counterpart, even a caricature, of Kṛṣṇa's support of Arjuna,⁹³ or from its relationship to other episodes, mentioned above, such as Draupadi's prayer to him when she is threatened with disrobing (Mbh. 2.535*) or his theophany to Duryodhana (Mbh. 5.129.1–15).

The first *adhyāya* sets the scene, with Arjuna giving expression to his despondency and declaring that he will not fight. Beginning with the second chapter, Kṛṣṇa reveals to Arjuna the limitations of his view, stressing the need to fulfil one's role in society. He teaches that

Lavaṇa is killed by Śatruघna in the *Uttarakānda* of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, hardly suggests that there is any specific reference yet to Viṣṇu.

⁹¹ For example, Robert N. Minor states, with more finesse than most, though still too simply: 'Finally one must note that complete verses and partial verses from the *Gītā* are quoted verbatim throughout the Epic. . . . That the *Gītā* is referred to in the *Mahābhārata*, however, does not show that the *Gītā* was originally a part of the Epic, but it does argue that these portions of the Epic are later than the *Gītā*'s addition to it' (*Bhagavadgītā* 1982: xxix–xxx).

⁹² For the record, instances noted are as follows (identity of single *pādas* has usually been ignored as due either to the formulaic nature of the epic style or to coincidence): 1.2–19 is very close to 6.47.2–30, 2.28 cf. 11.7* 1–2, 2.31cd cf. 6.118.32cd, 2.37ab cf. 4.64.25cd, 2.38ab is very close to 12.277.37ab, 2.46 to 5.45.23, 2.58ab to 12.21.3ab and 168.40ab, 2.70 cf. 12.243.9+693*, 3.24ab cf. 3.33.10ab, 3.42 cf. 12.238.3, 4.7 is very close to 3.187.26, 5.5 cf. 12.304.4, also 12.293.30, 5.18 is very close to 12.231.19, 5.20ab cf. 3.198.41ab and 12.170.5cd, 6.5cd is identical to 5.34.62cd and 13.6.27ab (cf. 11.11* 3), 6.22ab is very close to 13.16.42ab, 6.23ab cf. 3.203.44cd, 6.29ab is very close to 12.313.29ab, 9.32bcd is identical to 14.19.56bcd, 9.33a is very close to 14.19.57a, 11.11ab is identical (apart from case) to 13.110.97cd, 123ab, 11.22ab is very close to 13.143.32ab, 12.15ab cf. 14.46.39ab, 13.13 is identical to 12.231.29 and 291.16 (also Śvet. Up. 3.16), 13.30 is identical to 12.17.22, 14.18 is very close to 14.39.10, 14.24 to 12.679* 1–2, 17.2cd to 12.187.28cd and 336.63cd, 17.3cd is identical to 12.256.14cd, 17.14cd to 12.210.17ab, 18.14 is very close to 12.898*, 18.41ab is identical to 12.108.1ab, and 18.72ab is very close to 14.19.50ab.

⁹³ Walter Ruben (1941b: 221), and Alf Hiltebeitel (1976b: 255–59).

the *ātman*, being eternal and indestructible, does not die when the body is destroyed but transmigrates from body to body until it achieves final release: ‘just as a man discards worn out clothes and puts on new ones, so the self abandons worn out bodies and acquires other new ones’ (2.22). Quoting from the *Katha Upaniṣad* to reinforce his point, Kṛṣṇa then applies it to Arjuna’s own situation, declaring that since death is not final there is no need to grieve over the imminent deaths in battle. One can recognise this eternal *ātman* through the practice of Yoga, by learning to detach oneself completely from the results of actions; by abandoning desires such a person reaches peace and the stillness of Brahman (2.71–2).

In the third chapter Kṛṣṇa examines the way of action (*karma*); he affirms that all activity is a sacrifice if undertaken in the right spirit, that of complete detachment, and so simultaneously provides a re-interpretation both of sacrifice and of the renunciatory way of life. He makes it clear that withdrawal into inactivity is not only useless but actually misguided, and even hints at insincerity on the part of some renouncers, suggesting that their thoughts may be more worldly than their actions (3.6–7). Just as Kṛṣṇa, as the supreme deity, does not need to act but is nonetheless constantly engaged in activity, since otherwise the world would collapse, so mankind should help to maintain the world order. Thus Arjuna should perform his caste duty (*dharma*) of fighting the enemy, but in a spirit of complete detachment without concern for the outcome. In associating himself with Kṛṣṇa in the battle of *dharma*, Arjuna also becomes the ‘sacrificer’ of this war, ensuring the victory of *dharma* and the maintenance of the three worlds. Every action becomes a ritual, just as every effort to overcome desire becomes a war.

Kṛṣṇa goes on from this to declare that, since desire is more basic than action, actions as such have no particular effect, provided one acts unselfishly and without interest in the result. In fact such disinterested action, rather than mere inactivity, is the true opposite to action. Action without attachment is action in accordance with one’s *dharma*, one’s religious and social duties which vary according to one’s particular situation. So Arjuna, as a member of the *kṣatriya varṇa*, has a duty to uphold law and order and for that reason to take part in the impending battle. Moreover, Arjuna should not think that he himself is responsible for his actions, for they are actually performed by the *guṇas*, the constituents of nature, which are entirely separate from the *ātman*. Thus, since one’s own *ātman* is in reality identical

with the *ātman* of all other creatures, one who harms others harms himself and we must treat all creatures alike, from the highest to the lowest, that is, like ourselves. Truly to apply this moral principle would seem necessarily to rule out any violent injury to living beings, but in the *Bhagavadgītā* the idea of *ahimsā* is little developed.⁹⁴ More often the *Bhagavadgītā* does not try to define duty, but contents itself with saying that man should do his duty simply because it is his duty.

In the fourth chapter Kṛṣṇa then takes up the way of knowledge (*jñāna*), the type of intuition that goes back as far as the speculative hymns of the *Rgveda* but is carefully defined here as knowledge of the deity (4.9–10); he even claims that knowledge itself may be obtained through disciplined activity (4.38, cf. *prāṇyāma* at 29d). Also within this chapter, in what comes to be seen as an enunciation of the *avatāra* principle, Kṛṣṇa declares: ‘Whenever there occurs a decline in righteousness (*dharma*) and a surge in unrighteousness, then I send forth myself, Bhārata. To protect the good and to destroy evildoers, in order to establish righteousness, I come into being from age to age’ (4.7–8). The first of these verses is effectively identical to Mbh. 3.187.26, within the revelation by Viṣṇu Nārāyaṇa to Mārkaṇḍeya, into which context it fits more naturally than into the *Bhagavadgītā*, where the passage is concerned mainly with rebirth in general.

The next two chapters however, on Brahman and *ātman* respectively, revert to ideas of meditation as the means to achieve insight. The fifth chapter, which is very similar in its ideas to the second chapter, takes up the theme of Brahman again but its exaltation of Brahman as both the goal of Yoga and as an external agency is much more emphatic. The self-discipline of Yoga is attained by intense concentration of one’s attention on a single point and those integrated in this way realise that the *ātman* is never the author of any action, for action is the sphere of nature (*svabhāva*), and they experience no emotion, being established in Brahman. The term *brahmabhūta*, used here (5.24d) and at two other places in the *Bhagavadgītā* (6.27d and 18.54a), occurs several times elsewhere in the *Mahābhārata*, suggesting that these parts perhaps have more in common with other didactic parts of the *Mahābhārata* than some others.⁹⁵

⁹⁴ The term *ahimsā* occurs four times in lists of virtues (10.5a, 13.7b, 16.2a, 17.14c, also *himśā* 18.25a, 27b) and is never singled out for particular attention, instead being left half hidden in such rather formal lists, but then Kṛṣṇa’s teachings are meant to dispel Arjuna’s qualms at killing his opponents.

⁹⁵ The term occurs at Mbh. 1.1.12d, 3.82.58d, 145.30c, 181.12c, 202.14c, 6.63.16a,

One explanation suggested for the *Bhagavadgītā*'s apparent inconsistency is that Kṛṣṇa leads Arjuna gradually from a basically atheistic Sāṃkhya-Yoga cosmology and psychology to a fully theistic position. On this view, three of the first six chapters are concerned directly with Brahman and *ātman* and only secondarily with the deity. By nature the soul inhabits an eternal world, the sum-total of which is Brahman. One can recognise this eternal *ātman* here and now through the practice of Yoga, that is by learning to detach oneself completely from the results of action and concentrating one's attention on the deity. However, the deity concerned is simply the Īśvara of classical Yoga, the *ātman* totally unaffected by matter which serves as an aid to contemplation. Since the first six chapters clearly are mainly devoted to the nature of the *ātman* and the realisation of its essence, it is not surprising that *bhakti* is not prominent. Renunciation (*tyāga*) and passionlessness (*vairāgya*) are the ideals and *bhakti* is devotion to the *bhagavat*, the Lord, although in fact *bhakti* is rarely mentioned in these chapters.

The central section (*adhyāyas* 7–12) mainly deals with the nature of the supreme deity and his attributes. Chapter 7 provides a clearly theistic version of Sāṃkhyayoga: the eightfold *prakṛti* is called Kṛṣṇa's 'lower nature' (7.4), which Kṛṣṇa's 'higher nature' supports or sustains, and everything ultimately derives from and dissolves into the higher and lower natures of Kṛṣṇa (7.5). This semi-pantheism is qualified, however, by firmly excluding evil from the deity's nature. Chapter 8 again presents the method of meditation in Yoga as the way to release, independent of the deity, but with a difference: now, even those self-centred yogins who merely use the deity as a focus for their meditation and whose ultimate aim is to isolate their own *ātmans* in their eternal essence, will be helped by him and brought near to him in return for their good intentions (8.11–15). Emphasis on the deity reaches its climax within this section in the theophany in the eleventh chapter, where Kṛṣṇa reveals to Arjuna his universal form (the *viśvarūpa*), after he has identified himself in the

64.1b, 7.172.55b, 12.49.19b, 192.122c, 210.28c, 316.52a, 13.26.41f, 56.17c, 118.7a, 119.22d and 14.26.26c (also, incidentally, at Rām. 1.32.16b). Similarly, *brahmabhūyāya kalpate* at BhG. 14.26d and 18.53d occurs also at Mbh. 12.154.25d, 208.19d, 243.7d, 12.138.31d, 130.33d, 131.56d and 14.47.8d. I would therefore disagree with Zachner's assertion that 'the phrase *brahma-bhūta*, "become Brahman", seems to have been borrowed from Buddhism' (*Bhagavadgītā* 1969: 29; cf. 10–11 and 214); cf. also Michael McElvaney (1988: 28).

previous chapter with the most essential aspects of every part of the cosmos. This revelation produces in Arjuna a spirit of humble adoration, summed up as the way of devotion (*bhakti*). The vision is described as ‘made up of all marvels’ (11.11c) but light imagery is frequent here, as it is in other religious or philosophical passages of the *Mahābhārata*, most basically in the simile of the steady lamp applied to the yogin. Biardeau has provided a new perspective on this chapter, in her study of the myth of the *pralaya*, with her observation that it is one of two used in the ritual of initiation into *samnyāsa*. The choice of 11.15–33—which comprise Arjuna’s description of the vision and Kṛṣṇa’s explanation of its meaning—for recitation at this point is significant, for it recalls to the *samnyāsin* the cosmic and terrible dimension of the god of *mokṣa*, since the vision which Arjuna has is similar to that which an observer of the *pralaya* would have were he situated beyond it.⁹⁶

In form the chapter consists of a hymn in *triṣṭubhs* embedded in introductory and concluding *ślokas*. The style is not markedly different but, while the introductory *ślokas* present the marvellous *rūpam aiśvaryam* to us, the hymn confronts us with the *ghorarūpam*. Kṛṣṇa’s assertion in the hymn that nobody in the world of men except Arjuna can see him in this form is most clearly reinterpreted in the concluding *ślokas* as the instruction that there is no other way to see God in this form except through *bhakti*. As Ježić has shown, this hymn evidently presupposes the epic part of the text but, since it contains a brief statement of Arjuna’s dilemma and not just Kṛṣṇa’s answer to it, it must have been intended as a separate composition and not as another layer added to the epic part.⁹⁷ Indeed, examination of the text shows that 12.1 takes up from 10.10, continuing as though the theophany had never happened, just as the rest of the *Mahābhārata* proceeds largely as though the *Bhagavadgītā* were not there.

The final set of six chapters, which in all probability are later in date than the rest, deal with a variety of topics and gradually lead back through a considerable amount of practical moral teaching—and a summary of Kṛṣṇa’s earlier teaching towards the end of chapter 18⁹⁸—to the concept of *bhakti*. Both in the commentarial tradition

⁹⁶ Biardeau 1968–78: III (1971); cf. Hiltebeitel 1976b: 114–20.

⁹⁷ Ježić 1986.

⁹⁸ Some of this recapitulation actually echoes the wording of earlier chapters: 18.47 combines 3.35ab and 4.21cd, 53ab is similar to 16.18ab, and 65ab is identical to 9.34ab (the identity extending into the third *pāda*).

and by modern scholars these chapters are given very little attention (apart from Kṛṣṇa's words near the end of chapter 18), almost as if they did not really belong to the text. Descriptions here of the Sāṃkhya doctrine are in closer accord with the classical scheme than those found in chapters 3 and 7: the passage 13.1–5 gives the classical list of the 25 *tattvas*, while 14.5–21 presents the *gunas* in the dual role of psychological qualities and constituents of nature (*prakṛti*). The results of the preponderance of each of the three *gunas* in various parts of *prakṛti* are given in some detail in 14.5–18 (and the whole of chapter 17). Most interestingly, in the two preceding verses (14.3–4), cosmic matter is not called *prakṛti* but great Brahman and, instead of an evolution of beings out of matter independently of the deity, Kṛṣṇa plants the germ in the womb of nature (Brahman is probably also an equivalent for material nature in 5.10).

A verse which has often been discussed (15.16) speaks of two Puruṣas, one perishable, the other imperishable, and declares that the perishable is all beings, the imperishable is the one who is aloof or sublime (*kūṭastha*).⁹⁹ The imperishable is evidently that aspect which may be termed the sum total of all liberated selves and the perishable *puruṣa* is man or the person bound to material nature. Zaehner regards the term *kūṭastha* as due to Buddhist influence, since the equivalent *kūṭattha* is found in the Pāli canon, as Renou had earlier noted.¹⁰⁰ The term occurs three times in the *Bhagavadgītā*. It refers either to the released individual, as at 6.8, or to the general state shared by all such released individuals, as here, where the one 'standing on the peak' is the imperishable person, the Brahman-Ātman as eternal, changeless being. It also occurs at 12.3–4 where the 'imperishable unmanifest' must also be the aggregate of released selves—the unchanging essence in all men described already in 2.24–5 in almost identical terms. Kṛṣṇa is thus declaring that those who concentrate on the eternal essence within themselves must reach his own being, since he is the source of eternity itself (cf. 14.17); elsewhere in the *Mahābhārata*, in a basically Sāṃkhya context, the wise man who knows the imperishable as aloof, *kūṭastha*, reaches the imperishable Brahman and is freed from *samsāra* (Mbh. 12.231.34). In the next verse, 15.17, Kṛṣṇa adds: 'But there is <yet> another Person [i.e., a third aspect of the Puruṣa concept], the sublime (*uttama*), also named the supreme

⁹⁹ See, for example, Johnston 1937: 74–75.

¹⁰⁰ Zaehner 1967: 382, and Renou 1951: 25.

(*parama*) ātman, who enters and pervades the three worlds, sustaining them, the imperishable Lord', clearly claiming these titles for himself.

The progressive return to the concept of *bhakti* reaches its climax in Kṛṣṇa's declaration of his attachment (*bhakti*) to Arjuna and the promise that by his grace he can be reached and entered into. This devotion, however, is rather different in nature from later, since it is characterised by sacrifice and discipline and so there is little room for spontaneity. Indeed, the stress on duty (*dharma*) as specifically the role appropriate to one's station in life suggests the opposite. There is no real suggestion of intimacy either, except as part of the goal, but instead the attitude of the devotee is one of subservience, typified by Arjuna's humble response to Kṛṣṇa's divine self-revelation. This way of devotion, available to all, is placed above the way of knowledge, which because of its difficulties few can achieve, and that in turn is superior to the way of action, the performance of deeds without attachment to their results but merely out of duty. Although these ways are not rejected, a definite precedence is established; this is perhaps the first clear appearance of this principle of ranking.

The other avatāras

The *avatāra* theory seems to have evolved in the *Mahābhārata* with the identification of Nārāyaṇa with Vāsudeva, who came to be seen as his human incarnation. Significantly, in the text of the *Mahābhārata* these manifestations are forms of Nārāyaṇa, not yet of Viṣṇu, as Brinkhaus has established.¹⁰¹ It is not merely a belief in the assumption of various forms by a deity; the *Bhagavadgītā*, which contains what is commonly regarded as the foundation statement for this concept, clearly states that the deity incarnates himself with a purpose, to destroy the wicked and protect the righteous (4.5–8).¹⁰² The

¹⁰¹ See Brinkhaus 1993. The only exception, if it can really be called that, is that 2 App. 21 ascribes the *prādurbhāvas* that it lists to Viṣṇu, who is equated though with Nārāyaṇa and located in Śvetadvīpa, but then this lengthy Southern insert is derived from *Harivamśa* 31, as Vaidya shows (*Harivamśa* 1969–71: I, xlvi–lxix). After declaring that there are thousands (*prādurbhāvasahasrāni*, 2 App. 21.136), Bhīṣma actually deals with Puṣkara (138–141), Vārāha (142–169), Nārasimha (170–310), Vāmana (311–374), Dattātreya (375–428), Jāmadagnya (429–491), Dāśarathi (492–582), Kṛṣṇa (583–592 and 611–1612) and Kalkin (593–596).

¹⁰² In this form the doctrine may possibly have been influenced by the Buddhist concept of former Buddhas, since some of them are known to have been worshipped as early as the 3rd century B.C.

Bhagavadgītā also states that whatever is endowed with power, prosperity and strength is sprung from a part of the god's energy (10.49); in this sense everything outstanding is a partial manifestation of the deity.

The *avatāras* emerge only during the later phases of development of the *Mahābhārata*, although they are not yet classified as systematically as in later literature and indeed are usually called by the older term *prādurbhāva*, 'manifestation', as Hacker established.¹⁰³ A varying number of animal and human heroes come to be viewed as exemplars of the god's benevolent activity on earth, and eventually to be identified completely with him. Several of the stories have had to undergo some modification to fit this theme, even to the extent of being taken over from other deities. The number of incarnations varies: it seems to have started from a nucleus of four (12.337.36, slightly oddly following a reference to *rūpāny anekāni* in the previous verse), but gradually the number was extended in later texts. Possibly the oldest form is that in 1.58.35–51 where, in response to Earth's request for relief from the oppression of the Asuras, Indra and Nārāyaṇa agree to descend to earth, for Nārāyaṇa obviously becomes Kṛṣṇa, as later chapters indicate. Similarly, during Mārkaṇḍeya's *pralaya* vision at 3.186.56ff., Nārāyaṇa lists his different colours in the different Yugas and says that he has become Kṛṣṇa in the Kaliyuga.

The fullest information comes from the *Nārāyanīya* (12.321–39), which in fact contains two separate lists of *avatāras*: the one already mentioned, at 12.337.36, listing just four incarnations as Varāha, Narasiṁha, Vāmana and Mānuṣa (i.e. Kṛṣṇa), whose purpose is to relieve the burden of the earth oppressed by too many creatures, and another at 12.326.72–94 enumerating six, which in any case emphasises their deeds rather than their being *avatāras*, even though representing a relatively later phase in the development of the list. 12.326 first gives among the forms of Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa his four *mūrtis*, Vāsudeva, Saṃkarṣaṇa/Śeṣa, Pradyumna and Aniruddha (31–39+68–69), known in Pāñcarātra literature as his *vyūhas*, before adding—in what may well be a later addition—his *prādurbhāvas* Varāha, Narasiṁha, the punisher of Bali (not explicitly named), Rāma Bhṛgukulodvaha (= Paraśurāma), Rāma Dāśarathi, Kṛṣṇa and the rescuers of the sacred tradition, Hamsa and Hayasiras (72–94); however, the relationship between *mūrtis* and *prādurbhāvas* is not made clear. Several Southern manuscripts insert before this a passage in which the *prādurbhāvas* are

¹⁰³ Hacker 1960.

explicitly listed as being ten: *matsya*, *kūrma*, *varāha*, Nārasimha, Vāmana, Rāma [Bhārgava], Rāma [Rāghava], [Bala-] Rāma, Kṛṣṇa and Kalkin (12.835* 4–5), while several Northern manuscripts modify 94ab, replacing Hayaśiras with *kūrma*, and add 851* to produce the following list of ten (although the figure is not given): *hamsa*, *kūrma*, *matsya*, Vārāha, Nārasimha, Vāmana, Rāma [Bhārgava], Rāma Dāśarathi, Sātvata (presumably Kṛṣṇa) and Kalki.¹⁰⁴

Four of the *avatāras*, *matsya*, *kūrma*, *varāha* and Vāmana, make use of cosmogonic myths from the Vedas and Brāhmaṇas, pointing to a similar cosmogonic role for them as incarnations of Viṣṇu, but none of the first three is associated with Viṣṇu in Vedic literature. According to *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 1.8.1, the first man, Manu, was saved by a fish from a great deluge, while the tortoise, *kūrma*, supports the earth on his back at the time of the churning of the ocean, but the Brāhmaṇas identify both creatures with Prajāpati. Though mentioned in the *Mahābhārata*, it is only in the Purāṇas that both fish and tortoise are firmly linked to Viṣṇu. The *Mahābhārata* devotes a whole chapter to the myth of Manu and the fish, as part of Mārkandeya's instruction of Yudhiṣṭhira (3.185, cf. also 12.300) but the fish declares himself to be Prajāpati Brahmā (3.185.48c) and the narrative itself is termed a Purāṇa (*ity etan mātsyakam nāma purāṇam parikīrtitam*, 3.185.53ab).

The tortoise plays an important role in the churning of the ocean, in keeping with its cosmogonic and cosmographic role, since it carries the earth and ensures its stability. Already in the Brāhmaṇas (e.g. ŚB 6.1.1.13, 7.5.1.5) the tortoise appears as a cosmogonic agent in the description of the piling-up of the bricks for the fire altar (*agnicayana*), when a live tortoise is immured at the base of the altar. Its rounded shell enclosing it within two hemispheres, from which it puts out at will its head and feet, no doubt rendered it a natural image of earth and heaven together with the living beings they contain.¹⁰⁵ The original link with the sacrifice never disappears, even when no longer clearly felt by popular consciousness. The Brāhmaṇas also mention the tortoise as lord of the waters (e.g. ŚB 7.5.1.9) and thus a representative of Varuṇa himself lying as a husband beside a

¹⁰⁴ Cf. also 7.1442*—read by D6 only—ll. 4–7 (following a near repeat of BhG. 4.7):
matsyah kūrmo varāhaś ca nr̄simha vāmano harih |
sādhyo nārāyaṇo viṣṇuh kaśyapasyātmasaṁbhavaḥ |
rāmo rāmaś ca rāmaś ca vāsuḍevaś ca yādavaḥ |
kalkī bhavīṣyate vipro yuge kṣīne punar harih |

¹⁰⁵ Also, a folk etymology links its name with *vkṛ*, ‘to do/make’.

representative of the earth (ŚB 7.5.1.6, cf. 6.5.3.1). Elsewhere in the Brāhmaṇas, however, Prajāpati appears as the tortoise and even in the account of the churning of the ocean in the *Mahābhārata* it is still not identified with Viṣṇu (1.16.10–11, where this tortoise king is named Akūpāra), as it is at *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* 1.9.87. Another word for tortoise, *kaśyapa*, used as a proper name denotes one of the ‘genitors’ of creatures, *prajāpatis*. Kaśyapa appears in various myths as either the father of the gods and demons or of the snakes of the underworld and of the divine birds; for example, at Mbh. 1.14.5–23 he is the husband of Kadrū and Vinatā, mothers of a thousand snakes and of Aruṇa and Garuḍa respectively.

The third appearance, as *varāha*, the boar, was to raise up the Earth after she had been plunged into the ocean; in the developed myth this is caused by the machinations of the Asura Hiranyāksa.¹⁰⁶ In the older Vedic literature two distinct boar myths are found: one boar raises the earth during the cosmogony and is identified with Prajāpati, the other one is an Asura named Emūṣa who has to be defeated by Indra and Viṣṇu; however, the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* conflates them, referring to the boar Emūṣa who raised Earth from the primeval waters and identifying him with Prajāpati (14.1.2.11). In the *Mahābhārata* the raising of the earth by the boar is occasionally mentioned as an activity of Nārāyaṇa.¹⁰⁷ In the context of the cosmic contest between the gods and the Dānavas, the gods praise Nārāyaṇa for rescuing the earth in the form of a boar, killing Hiranyakāśipu in his form as Narasiṁha, subduing Bali in the form of a dwarf and overthrowing Jambha, the wrecker of sacrifices (3.100.19–22).¹⁰⁸ In Mārkaṇḍeya’s report on the *pralaya*, already mentioned, Nārāyaṇa enumerates as his manifestations Śeṣa, Varāha and the mare-headed fire (3.187.10–12), among which only Varāha was later included in the classic *prādurbhāva* list. Elsewhere the Daitya Hiranyāksa is mentioned, without any men-

¹⁰⁶ On the Varāha *avatāra* see Brinkhaus (1991), Adalbert Gail (1977b) and Maheshwari Prasad (1993).

¹⁰⁷ Prasad (1993: 100) notes that there are many *Mahābhārata* references to Varāha and lists: 1.19.11, 2 App. 21.141–168, 3.81.15, 100.19, App. 16, 187.11, App. 27.1–52, 294.28, 6.63.13, 12.43.8, 47.*76,*96, App. 6.5.13–14, App. 7.5–6, 202.1–33, 202.*550–*557, 326.*835.4, 326.*851, 327.95, 330.5, 24, 27–28, 333.10ff., 335.1, 337.36, 12.135.71, App. 14.176–90.

¹⁰⁸ This last activity does not achieve inclusion in the lists, although the Asura Jambha is mentioned also, for example, at Mbh. 2.55.11. This whole *Tīrthayātraparvan* passage (3.100.18–23ab) is paralleled at *Padma Purāṇa* 5.19.123–127ab; similarly, the mention of a Varāhatīrtha in Kurukṣetra at 3.81.15 is identical to *Padma Purāṇa* 1.26.15cd–16ab.

tion of his worsting by the boar (e.g. Mbh. 7.165.70, 9.30.9), while Viṣṇu takes the form of a boar to defeat an Asura leader but he is named as Naraka (12.202.7–29). Evidently the two components of the developed *avatāra* myth had not yet come together. The *Nārāyanīya* has a brief reference, in the context of the number of *pindas* for the ancestors, where Govinda takes the boar form (12.333.11).¹⁰⁹ In the late *Mahābhārata* Viṣṇu is the boar who rescues the over-populated earth (3 App. 16, where the name Viṣṇu occurs five times and *Nārāyaṇa* once), a pre-classical form still of the *avatāra* myth in which the demon is as yet lacking. In another late passage (3 App. 27), four manifestations are mentioned—Varāha (termed *yajñavarāha* at line 51), Narasiṁha, Vāmana and Kṛṣṇa—and the deity is called both Viṣṇu (4 times, also *vaiṣṇava* once) and *Nārāyaṇa* (3 times). However, in another late insertion Viṣṇu alone is named as becoming the boar who raises the earth and kills all the Dānavas, and again is termed *yajñavarāha* (2 App. 21.142–167). Finally, Hiranyākṣa is named as the defeated opponent in three similes (7.13.44cd, 165.70cd, 9.30.9ab), as well as in one of the two *avatāra* lists in the *Nārāyanīya* (12.326.72–73).

It was 3 App. 27 (= Citrashala Press 3.272.49–55) that formed one of the prime texts in Hacker's analysis of the *avatāra* concept and which he saw as the direct source of the *Harivamśa* passages (Hv. 31.32–67 and App. 42.1–583).¹¹⁰ This view is clearly now in need of revision. The *Mahābhārata* passage does certainly have some lines in common with the *Harivamśa* passages (e.g. Mbh. 3 App. 27.54 = Hv. 31.65ab = App. 42.81, etc.) and shows greater similarity to the longer *Harivamśa* version in App. 42, but this cannot be the source of the *Mahābhārata* passage, since it is by far the more developed of the two. Most probably its source was a version also used by the *Harivamśa*, which the *Mahābhārata* passage summarised and the *Harivamśa* extended; Prasad argues that this source was the *Vāyu Purāṇa*, even though that has a longer text.¹¹¹

The fourth *avatāra* in the classical list is the man-lion, Narasiṁha, who comes to free the world from Hiranyakaśipu, Hiranyākṣa's brother, and to protect his son from the father's anger. Narasiṁha does not appear in Vedic literature (except for a late passage in the *Taittirīya*

¹⁰⁹ Prasad (1993: 123–24) suggests that this passage appears to have influenced the later texts, since the association of Varāha with three *pindas* is also known to the *Harivamśa* (App. 42B.11.3000–3001), *Viṣṇudharmottara* (I.139.9ff.), and *Brahma Purāṇa* (219).

¹¹⁰ Hacker 1960.

¹¹¹ Prasad 1993: 116–20.

Āranyaka), but there are noteworthy similarities to the story of Indra and Namuci (RV 8.14.13, ŚB 12.7.3.1–3). In both cases the demons have received what they are satisfied is an all-embracing promise of inviolability, and are only overcome by subterfuge. This form of the myth is not confined to India: a large number of similar solutions to the problem of performing the Paradoxical Task are listed in the Thompson *Motif-Index* under the numbers H 1050–77 and M 367.1.¹¹² Narasimha is mentioned in the *avatāra* list at Mbh. 12.337.36, already discussed, and he seems to be mentioned in the older, shorter lists only in the context of a manifestation of Nārāyaṇa.¹¹³ The Narasimha myth may therefore have been created from the start in connection with one or more manifestations or deeds of that deity; its frequent association with the Trivikrama myth may suggest that this was the one. The Southern recension has a very late but significant addition to the *Sabhāparvan*, in which at Bali's defeat Namuci too is thrust down into the nether world, along with Śambara and Prahrāda—both enemies of Indra and killed by him in older legend (2 App. 21.358–9).

By contrast, the incarnation as Vāmana, the dwarf, has developed from the feat attributed to Viṣṇu in the *Rgveda* of striding through the universe. Now in the second age, the Tretāyuga, the world and the gods are being threatened by the demon tyrant Bali; so, when the tyrant is performing a sacrifice, Viṣṇu, in the guise of a dwarf, begs as much land as he can cover in three strides, transforms himself into a giant, and wins back the whole world. The older myth of the *trivikrama* was transformed in the *Mahābhārata* into the Vāmana legend by introducing Bali as the enemy, as Tripathi has shown.¹¹⁴ In the brief account at Mbh. 12.326.74–76, Nārāyaṇa declares that, when Bali steals the triple world from Indra, he will take birth as the twelfth son of Aditi and Kaśyapa and restore sovereignty to Indra, without mentioning a dwarf form, whereas the later and slightly fuller account at 3 App. 27.64–82 does include the dwarf form and Bali's sacrifice. So too, as already mentioned, the gods praise Nārāyaṇa for rescuing the earth in the form of a boar, killing Hiranyakāśipu in his form as

¹¹² Thompson 1955–58.

¹¹³ The fact that *nṛsimha* can be used in the sense of ‘lion among men’ (at for example 8.27.39d) suggests that Narasimha was not yet well known to the authors of the narrative portions.

¹¹⁴ Gaya Charan Tripathi (1968: part II). The tale is part of the widespread and varied motif of the Deceptive Land Bargain (Thompson 1955–58, motif K 185).

Narasimha and subduing Bali in the form of a dwarf (3.100.19–22). Elsewhere in the *Śāntiparvan* there occur two versions of an encounter by Indra with Bali after his fall, where Bali acts as a teacher (12.216–8 and 220–1); these are part of a series of such instructions or chastenings of Indra, imparted also by Prahlāda and Namuci (12.215 and 219; cf. also 12.173.3). The second refers very briefly to the worlds being traversed by Viṣṇu (12.220.7c) but otherwise the cause of Bali's present state is taken for granted. However, they are of some interest as representing the first hints of the rehabilitation, as it were, of Bali in later mythology.¹¹⁵

It is not immediately obvious why any list of *avatāras* should include Rāma Jāmadagnya or Bhārgava, known from the 6th century A.D. as Paraśurāma, 'Rāma with the axe', to distinguish him from Rāma Dāśarathi, the hero of the *Rāmā�ana*. He figures in Vedic literature only as the traditional author of *Rgveda* 10.110 and appears first in an active role in the epics, particularly the *Mahābhārata*; his story is then taken up by the *Purāṇas*, though never particularly popular outside the *Mahābhārata*. By no stretch of the imagination can his activities be considered as saving the world from catastrophe. Reclaiming some land along the west coast by throwing his axe at the sea and frightening it into retreat is not an exploit comparable to the earlier cosmogonic myths. His blind obedience to his father's command (Jamadagni orders him to behead his mother Renukā, and he obeys after his brothers have refused, although he then asks for her to be restored to life) compares poorly with Rāma Dāśarathi's self-sacrifice. Paradoxically, a clue may be provided by the third story associated with him, which shows him in an even less benevolent light. As a brāhmaṇa, he determines to annihilate all the *kṣatriyas* to avenge his father's murder; that he does so (no fewer than twenty-one times) using the weapons of a warrior rather than a priest points to an origin for this legend at a time when the functions and status of these two classes were fiercely disputed. As his name Bhārgava indicates, he is the hero of the Bhṛgu group of brāhmaṇas, who were especially connected with the inflation of the *Mahābhārata*. Charpentier established that it was only in the very latest parts of the *Mahābhārata*—and not in the earlier parts nor even in the *Bālakāṇḍa* of the *Rāmā�ana*—that he was linked with Viṣṇu and therefore suggested that his

¹¹⁵ This forms the theme of Clifford Hospital's study, in which these passages (12.216–18 and 220–1) are discussed at some length (1984: 59–78).

recognition as an *avatāra* should be dated after the 5th century A.D., while also suggesting that the tradition of his winning land from the sea was originally linked with the area of Śūrpāraka (linked with the southern form of the tradition that he did so by shaking or throwing his winnowing basket, *sūrpa*) and so must date from at least some centuries B.C.¹¹⁶ Nevertheless, Biardeau has argued that Rāma Jāmadagnya is a typical embodiment of the *avatāra* concept, which is for her a paradoxical combination of opposites, creative and destructive, linking both Viṣṇu and Śiva.¹¹⁷ However, she also sees in his myth the expression of a theme which demonstrates the necessity for a true brāhmaṇ to avoid violence of any kind.

Goldman has examined the two accounts in the *Mahābhārata* of Rāma's conflict with Arjuna Kārtavīrya and suggests that the *Śāntiparvan* version (12.49) is a secondary retelling of the *Āranyakaparvan* version (3.115–117), which is, from a Bhārgava standpoint, a more complete and consistent telling of the story.¹¹⁸ Other briefer references to Rāma Jāmadagnya are scattered throughout the text, from near the beginning of the *Ādiparvan* (Samantapañcaka as the spot where Rāma annihilated the *ksatriyas* at 1.2.3–5) to the *Āśvamedhikaparvan* (where within the *Anugītā* his annihilation of the *ksatriyas* leads to a lesson from his ancestors that the conquest of the self is the highest goal, 14.29–30).¹¹⁹ References to his birth occur at 13.4 and 13.56, within the context of the narration of other Bhārgava myths. The motifs of the Rāma myth seem in fact largely to be drawn from others in the Bhārgava cycle, as Goldman argues, and thus to be a deliberate creation of the epic bards as a kind of summation of the whole cycle, with the purpose of underlining the shift in the custody of the poem from the hands of the *sūtas* to those of its new guardians, the Bhṛgu brāhmaṇs. Gail draws attention to the fact that *Mahābhārata* references to Rāma Jāmadagnya fall into two classes: those detailing the usual Rāma Jāmadagnya legends and those in which he is the guru and tutor in weapons to the heroes Bhīṣma, Drona and Karṇa (the latter is made possible by his living on Mount

¹¹⁶ Charpentier 1936 and 1927. Charpentier also felt that it is not impossible that some sort of historical event underlies the story of Paraśurāma and the *ksatriyas*.

¹¹⁷ Biardeau 1967–68, 1968a, 1970 and 1968–78: IV (1976), 185–90.

¹¹⁸ Goldman 1972a. In his subsequent book, Goldman translates the *Āranyakaparvan* passage (1977: 18–25).

¹¹⁹ The classic study and listing of such passages is of course that by V. S. Sukthankar (1936–37). Also significant is the study by Gail (1977a).

Mahendra).¹²⁰ Gail then alludes to the *Bālakānda* meeting of the two Rāmas, where Rāma Jāmadagnya comes from Mahendra. He quotes Goldman on the appearance of the axe as Rāma Jāmadagnya's weapon, which Goldman did not find in the text of the *Mahābhārata* but only in two inserts (Mbh. 12.105* and 109*), although Gail adds Mbh. 13.14.137ff. while recognising that this too is late.¹²¹ The reason for the choice of weapon is seen by Goldman as being to distinguish him from Rāma Dāśarathi, whose regular weapon is the bow and arrow.

In a very late passage (Mbh. 3 App. 14.20–71) there is included the incident, more fully recorded in the *Rāmāyaṇa* (1.73–75), of the clash between Rāma Jāmadagnya and Rāma Dāśarathi. As Sukthankar (for whom Rāma Jāmadagnya is present only as a result of Bhārgava interpolation and so entirely peripheral) succinctly remarks, 'This grotesque story, composed probably with the object of glorifying the Kṣatriya Rāma at the cost of the Brahmin Rāma, must be quite a modern interpolation, in the *Mahābhārata*. Contextually it is an obvious misfit, being incongruously wedged in between two halves of the Agastya legend, with which it has absolutely no connection.'¹²² Presumably, he suggests, it was included by some Northern manuscripts only in the interests of comprehensiveness, without regard to the poor light in which it presents Rāma Jāmadagnya. Brinkhaus has examined five versions of this encounter in different texts and argues, in opposition to Gail, that the elevation of the younger Rāma, Rāma Dāśarathi, to the status of an *avatāra* preceded that of Rāma Jāmadagnya, being found in the *Rāmāyaṇa* version, and that this *Mahābhārata* passage represents the final stage in this process, where Rāma Jāmadagnya is again demoted to a purely human figure.¹²³ However, as Lynn Thomas has noted, there are a number of parallels between the account of Rāma Jāmadagnya's most significant intervention in the *Mahābhārata*—his championing of Ambā against Bhīṣma (5.174–187)—and the *Rāmāyaṇa* account of the encounter between the two Rāmas; both of these accounts have cosmic and indeed eschatological emphases in the way that they are narrated.¹²⁴

¹²⁰ Gail 1977a: 34, cf. 222.

¹²¹ Gail 1977a: 43–44.

¹²² Sukthankar 1936–37: 21 (repr. 294). The *Rāmāyaṇa* passage will be discussed in the fifth section of chapter 9.

¹²³ Brinkhaus 1980.

¹²⁴ On this and the next point see Thomas 1996.

On the other hand, the tradition of his banishment to Mount Mahendra and his living on there to intervene at two other critical junctures, the marriage of Rāma Dāśarathi to Sītā and the events of the *Mahābhārata* war, is unique among the *avatāras*, and means that Rāma Jāmadagnya is the only one who is not confined historically to a particular time and place. The identification of Kurukṣetra with Samantapañcaka, the scene of Rāma's massacre of the *kṣatriyas*, does appear to have a definite significance for certain redactors of the epic—it occurs not only at 1.2.3–9 but also at 12.48.7–9—and an allusion to his activities precedes the account of the partial incarnations at 1.58.4–8), while the warriors taking part in the war are said several times to be descended from the remnant left from that slaughter (e.g. 2.13.2 and 12.49.79). The linking of Rāma's slaughter of the *kṣatriyas* with the *Mahābhārata* battle can be seen as a statement about the scale of the slaughter about to take place as well as possibly about its purpose, the removal of unrighteous kings who are oppressing the earth.

Consideration of Rāma Dāśarathi as an *avatāra* can scarcely be separated from the issue of the interrelationship between the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*, which will be examined in a subsequent chapter. However, the relevant points from that discussion can be noted here. In the bulk of the *Rāmopākhyāna*, which is the main version of the Rāma story in the *Mahābhārata* (3.258–275), Rāma is seen as human, but as an exemplary figure; indeed, this is the logic of its inclusion in the *Mahābhārata* as one of the instances that Mārkaṇḍeya narrates in response to Yudhiṣṭhira's question about whether there was any man more unfortunate than he. The sole exception to this is the brief *adhyāya* 260 where Viṣṇu incarnates as Rāma, whereas at 3.275.38c Rāma is merely compared to Indra at the point in the story where the gods reveal his divinity to him in the *Rāmāyaṇa*. Another four passages are based on the concluding verses of the *Yuddhakāṇḍa*, prefaced in three of them by a summary of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. These passages form more nearly two pairs, since two treat Rāma as an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu (Hv. 31.110–142 and Mbh. 2 App. 21.492–582) as part of their account of all the *avatāras*, while the other two include him among the sixteen kings of old (*Sodaśarājakaṭya*, Mbh. 12.29.46–55 and 7 App. 8.437–482). In another independent summary of the Rāma story (Mbh. 3.147), Hanumān explicitly declares to Bhīma that Rāma is Viṣṇu in human form (3.147.28).

The Buddha is absent from the text of the *Mahābhārata*, though occurring in the *Viṣṇu* and *Matsya Purāṇas*, which suggests a date of

the 5th century A.D. at the earliest for his recognition. The Buddha *avatāra* is also shown on the Gupta Daśavatāra temple at Deogarh and mentioned in a 7th-century Pallava inscription (which contains an identical list of the ten *avatāras* to Mbh. 12.835* apart from reading Buddha rather than Kṛṣṇa as the ninth *avatāra*).¹²⁵ The Buddha *avatāra* may well have been inspired by the Kalkin *avatāra*.

Kalkin is the tenth and last *avatāra*, a millennial figure, who will appear at the end of the present Kaliyuga to punish the wicked, reward the good and inaugurate a new era of sacrifice and *dharma* (Mbh. 3.188.85–189.6, the only occurrence in the text). His inclusion in the list seems to reflect a belief that the evil state of the world then absolutely demanded the intervention of an *avatāra*. His name, however, is somewhat enigmatic, since its natural meaning would be ‘dirty’ or ‘sinful’ (and is used with that sense in the Jain tradition) and so a derivation from *karka*, ‘white’ has been proposed.¹²⁶ The *Mahābhārata* says that Viṣṇu will be born as Kalkin in order to destroy *mlecchas* and heretics (3.188.93, also 2 App. 21.593–6 and 12 App. 31.18–23, cf. *Vāyu Purāṇa* 2.37.390). This may represent a reaction to a historical event such as the invasions of NW India between the 2nd century B.C. and the 2nd century A.D.; the fact that in many other texts Kalkin appears as a warrior on horseback supports this possibility.¹²⁷ However, he probably owes his main inspiration to the Buddhist doctrine of Maitreya, the future Buddha, and thus ultimately to Zoroastrian ideas of the future Saviour, perhaps brought into India by these same invaders. This also, incidentally, provides an indication of the dating of this part of the *Āranyakaparvan*.

In his non-canonical *avatāra* Hayagrīva, who at 5.97.3–5 and in the oldest parts of the *Purāṇas* is still a demonic figure unconnected with Viṣṇu, Viṣṇu has a horse’s head (cf. 12.347). Hayagrīva (also known as Hayaśiras, Hayasya and Nṛturamga) is another of the part-human, part-animal incarnations, whose early fame is rather eclipsed later. The *Mahābhārata* (12.335.16–64) narrates how, after Madhu and Kaiṭabha seized the Vedas from Brahmā and dived to the bottom of the ocean, Hari assumed a horse-headed form (*hayaśiras*), entered the

¹²⁵ See, in general, Gail 1969. Gail also charges that the Critical Edition suppressed mention of the Buddha in 12.835* (1969: 923).

¹²⁶ See Otto Schrader (1937). It is perhaps relevant that at 12.385* 5 two manuscripts, G3.6, read *karki* for *kalki*, while at 12 App. 31.19 these two and also T1 again have *karki* for *kalki*.

¹²⁷ In the horse form there is possibly some link with Hayagrīva, discussed below.

nether world and recovered the Vedas.¹²⁸ Hayagrīva is also mentioned at 12.126.3 (as Aśvāśiras reading the eternal Vedas) and Nārāyaṇa identifies himself as Hayaśiras at 12.330.36, whereas Aśvāśiras and Aśvagrīva are listed among Dānavas or Asuras at 1.59.23–24 and 1.61.10+18 (and at *Harivamṣa* 33.15 Hayagrīva is a Dānava). Other figures sometimes regarded as *avatāras* include Kṛṣṇa's brother Balarāma (12.835* 5) who, in addition to his Nāga characteristics, also has some Śaiva attributes,¹²⁹ and another relatively early figure Dattātreya, who was the object of a largely tantric cult localised in Mahārāṣṭra and is represented in the Purāṇas as a forester with a taste for wine, women and song; he is mentioned at 13.137.5 (also 2 App. I.21.375–428, 3 App. I.15 and 12.106*).

The *hamṣa* form listed at 12.326.94a seems not to occur elsewhere in the *Mahābhārata*, unless the use of the term as a name of Viṣṇu in the *Viṣṇusahasranāmatoṭra* (13.135.34) is so meant (but more probably it is intended to identify the *ātman* with the deity); perhaps slightly more likely is some link with the account in 12.288 of Prajāpati assuming the form of a golden *hamṣa* in order to teach the Sādhyas (the earlier association of other theriomorphic *avatāras* with Prajāpati was noted above). However, these alternative candidates probably differed too much from the standard pattern to remain popular, whatever the reasons for their initial inclusion. Paul Hacker suggests that, with the rise of the *bhakti* movement, religious interest switched from the theme of the deity's occasional intervention as an *avatāra* to that of his abiding presence through grace in the heart of each devotee, and so the mythology of the *avatāras* did not develop any further.¹³⁰

The standard list of *avatāras* is in fact quite heterogeneous and the problems of tying in the theory with existing myth are sometimes obvious.¹³¹ This is most true of the first *avatāras*, whose stories are basically a repetition of cosmogonic myths from the Brāhmaṇas and

¹²⁸ The version of Viṣṇu's slaughter of Madhu and Kaitabha found at Mbh. 3.194.8–30 makes no mention of his assuming the horse-headed form and indeed implies that he did not. The term *vadavāmukha* also occurs as a name of Nārāyaṇa at 12.325.4⁷⁹.

¹²⁹ In general Balarāma is a rather marginal figure in the *Mahābhārata* (in contrast to the *Harivamṣa*) and the occasional references to him do not otherwise suggest that he is an *avatāra*. Indeed, they tend to chart his absence (from the destruction of the Vṛṣnis and Andhakas, at 16.4.15) or his drunkenness (at Subhadrā's abduction by Arjuna (1.211–213). These episodes are briefly studied by Andreas Bigger (1994), as a foretaste of his thesis on the same subject.

¹³⁰ Hacker 1959: 76.

¹³¹ The material of the remainder of this section is based on Biardeau 1968–78: IV (1976).

the *Yajurveda*. The re-use of these themes in the *avatāra* myths is justified to the extent that an *avatāra* gives rise to a new world and so comes to have a cosmogonic role. However, neither fish, tortoise nor boar, unlike the dwarf, is identified with Viṣṇu or Nārāyaṇa in Vedic literature which, since it predates the concept of cyclic time, never emphasises the destructive aspect that is so important in the *avatāras*; even the fish of the Manu myth is not the contriver of the deluge, merely its prophet.

Since, apart from Kalkin, the *avatāras* belong to the past, it was natural to try to place them in chronological relationship to each other. Thus Rāma Jāmadagnya is placed at the juncture of the Tretā and Dvāpara Yugas at Mbh. 1.2.3, within the chapter which not only gives a summary of the whole epic but also assigns the great war to the juncture of the Dvāpara and Kali Yugas, the time of Kṛṣṇa's appearance on earth. The latter date is widely attested, in the *Mahābhārata*, the Purāṇas and elsewhere, and there seems to be no exception (either for Kṛṣṇa or for the war). The system which places Rāma Jāmadagnya and Kṛṣṇa respectively at the two *samdhīyās* preceding the present age is completed by assigning Narasiṁha to the juncture of the Kṛta and Tretā Yugas and Kalkin to the end of the Kaliyuga. However, already within the *Mahābhārata* this schema is modified and Paraśurāma is pushed back inside the Tretāyuga to make room for Rāma Dāśarathi at the juncture of the Tretā and Dvāpara Yugas (Mbh. 12.326.77–8).¹³² But it is worth examining more closely this sequence of *avatāras* given by Nārāyaṇa (12.326.71b–82): Varāha, Narasiṁha and Vāmana are in their usual positions but not specifically dated and only with difficulty could they be accommodated within a single *mahāyuga* to reach the Tretāyuga with Paraśurāma, so placed to accommodate Rāma Dāśarathi at the juncture with the Dvāpara Yuga, with Kṛṣṇa at the juncture of the Dvāpara and Kali Yugas. However, this attempt to systematise the chronology is not carried through. In fact, of course, only one situation makes sense: the descent of a saviour at the end of the Kaliyuga to bring back a golden age. It is artificial to make the *avatāras* correspond to any junctures between the Yugas except the Kali and the Kṛta. The structure of the Yugas, based as it is on the premise of continuous decline, is incompatible with the scheme of repeated rescue by the *avatāras*.

¹³² In the *Rāmāyaṇa* (1.73–75), Rāma Jāmadagnya is eclipsed by Rāma Dāśarathi and so his exploits are placed earlier.

Nārāyaṇa and the Pāñcarātra

Although many details about Nārāyaṇa and his origin are obscure, the cult and the ancient traditions about his significance and activities reveal links with mystics, ascetics and meditators.¹³³ He is the *r̄si* of the *Puruṣasūkta* (RV 10.90) which was to become central to later Vaiṣṇava thought. The *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* mentions a *puruṣa* Nārāyaṇa as having sent forth from the place of sacrifice the Vasus, Rudras and Ādityas by means of the morning, noon and evening offerings, after which at the instance of Prajāpati he sacrificed again and so placed himself in all the worlds, the gods, the Vedas, the vital breaths, etc., and all things were placed in him (12.3.4.1ff.); here, then, *puruṣa* Nārāyaṇa identifies himself with the whole cosmos through the sacrifice. Elsewhere it says that *puruṣa* Nārāyaṇa performed a *pāñcarātrasattra* (sacrifice continued over five days), thereby obtaining superiority over all beings, and ‘became all beings’ (13.6.1.1ff.). In the same text (Śat. Br. 6.1.1.5, 6.7.2.12ff., 6.7.4.7) Puruṣa and Prajāpati, the lord of creatures, tend to fuse and the latter is described as becoming and as imitating, that is identifying himself with, Viṣṇu. Nārāyaṇa is also referred to in the *Uttaranārāyaṇānuvāka*, an appendix to the *Puruṣasūkta* in the White Yajurveda (repeated in the *Taittirīya Āraṇyaka*). It is reasonable, therefore, to suppose that he was already revered as a divine figure. In any case, in the *Mahānārāyaṇa Upaniṣad* he is the highest lord, the All, the highest light, the all-pervading one and identified with Brahman (201–69); this text also includes a *gāyatrī mantra* in which Vāsudeva is identified with Nārāyaṇa and Viṣṇu (78). At *Manu* 1.10 he is Brahman in its cosmic aspect and the name Nārāyaṇa is derived from *nara*s ‘water’, as it is also at Mbh. 12.328.35cd (cf. 3 App. 27.24–26).¹³⁴ However, another derivation is offered elsewhere in the *Mahābhārata*, when it is said that he is known as Nārāyaṇa because he is the resort of men (*naraṇāṇa* ayanāc cāpi tena nārāyaṇah smṛtah, 5.68.10ab), which implies a form with an initial short syllable

¹³³ One of the first serious studies of Nārāyaṇa is that by Rudolf Otto (1934a), who examines the etymologies and use of the names Viṣṇu, Vāsudeva and Nārāyaṇa and suggests that the composite deity represents a type of deity characterised by immanence.

¹³⁴ This etymology, which is common in the Purāṇas, forms the starting point for Madeleine Biardeau’s treatment of the pair, Nara and Nārāyaṇa (Biardeau 1991).

(perhaps paralleling the alternation between Varāha and Vārāha, or even Vasudeva and Vāsudeva).¹³⁵

The *Mahābhārata*—which describes him as older than the oldest ones and as a great *yogin* who is constantly engaged in practising austerities (7.172.51), but also as the supreme deity (12.328.11ff.)—dwells on the austerities which resulted in his becoming Brahman and being able to see the supreme deity Śiva who granted him the boon that he would be superior to everyone, even Śiva himself. His relations with hermits and ascetics are also seen in the eulogy recited by Nārada in which he is identified with several classes of these holy men, named Haṁsa, Paramahaṁsa, Vālakhilya, Vaikhānasa and so on (12.325.4); elsewhere in the *Nārāyaṇīya* (12.321–339) the Vaikhānasas are said to have learnt his religion from the *phenapa* sages, who had it from Nārāyaṇa himself, and to have passed it on in a long chain of transmission through several *pralayas* (12.336.14), while one verse (12.323.39c–40b, already regarded in the text as a special utterance, forms the first verse of the *Jitamtestotra*, treated as a kind of *mantra* in later Vaikhānasa texts.¹³⁶ Nārāyaṇa is said to have been born in the waters from a golden egg and to produce from himself the world (3.272.44, 12.207.13), while his cosmic power is also shown when Mārkandeya enters the mouth of Nārāyaṇa and sees the whole universe inside his body (3.186.90–117); this whole episode speaks exclusively of Nārāyaṇa and there is no trace yet of identification with Viṣṇu or Kṛṣṇa Vāsudeva.

One of the distinctive doctrines propounded in the *Nārāyaṇīya* is the fourfold nature of the Supreme Being. Two series of names are found, one of limited significance and the other of major and lasting importance. According to the first, in the *kṛta* age at the beginning (*agre*, i.e. at the start of the cosmic cycle) Nārāyaṇa was born as the son of Dharma in the quadruple form of Nara, Nārāyaṇa, Hari and Kṛṣṇa (12.321.8–9, cf. 7.172.51).¹³⁷ Nara and Nārāyaṇa are thus the

¹³⁵ Cf. Paul Thieme 1985: 249/1064.

¹³⁶ For details see Gérard Colas 1996: 234–36.

¹³⁷ The same statement (with the same four names) is found at *Viṣṇudharmāḥ* 102.6–10, while the next verse states that Nara and Nārāyaṇa practise austerities on Mount Gandhamādana (cf. Mbh. 12.321.12–13, also 330.41 and 331.22). Reinhold Grünendahl (*Viṣṇudharmāḥ* 1983–89: III, 37–50) argues for a close connection between the Urvāśī episode (Vdha 102–3) and the *Nārāyaṇīya* since they share many central concepts and narrative elements.

first two members of the quadruple form issuing from the One, but the One is also called Nārāyaṇa; the term thus covers two types or levels of reality—one the supreme deity, the other one of the manifestations which can be grasped by the senses and human thought. The devotion to Nārāyaṇa, also called Sātvatamata and proclaimed by the Sun, is associated particularly with the people of Śvetadvīpa north of the Milk Ocean. However, the other and commoner description of the fourfold deity is as Vāsudeva, Saṃkarṣaṇa, Pradyumna and Aniruddha. It is not clear from the *Nārāyaṇīya* what relation the series of Vāsudeva, Saṃkarṣaṇa, Pradyumna and Aniruddha has with the series Nara, Nārāyaṇa, Hari and Kṛṣṇa (nor with the series Nārāyaṇa, Acyuta, Viṣṇu and Keśava in the four Yugas at 3.148, mentioned above). Perhaps, as van Buitenen suggests, it is a result of regional variations in the developing Vaiṣṇavism which would later be absorbed almost without trace in the Pañcarātra system.¹³⁸ Whereas the *Bhagavadgītā* rarely mentions the name Viṣṇu, the *Nārāyaṇīya* does use it to designate the Supreme Person, mainly in fact in the later chapters, although already at 324.30a the Lord is called Viṣṇu, giver of gifts, *varadarāja*. His absolute superiority is proclaimed at 328.26ab: ‘Viṣṇu does not bow before any other deity than himself.’ Beginning with *adhyāya* 328 the name Viṣṇu is often used instead of Nārāyaṇa; in chapter 329, where it appears frequently, it is especially in the prose portion, which appears late in character, being almost Purāṇic.¹³⁹ The tendency to identify various such figures is, however, already visible in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, as was noted above.

Elsewhere, especially in the *Dronaparvan*, the *Mahābhārata* repeatedly states that Arjuna Pāṇḍava is Nara and Kṛṣṇa Vāsudeva is Nārāyaṇa. In the burning of the Khāṇḍava forest, Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa are identified by a disembodied voice as Nara and Nārāyaṇa (1.219.15, cf. also App. 118.130ff., where Brahmā so identifies them, and App. 120.19); they have twice been so identified in previous *adhyāyas* of this *parvan* (1.1.117 and 1.210.5) and it may well be implied in the list of partial incarnations, where Arjuna is declared to be a portion of Indra, just as Vāsudeva is a portion of the eternal god of gods, Nārāyaṇa (1.61.84 and 90). Equally in the Kirāta episode Śiva informs Arjuna of his identity with Nara (3.41.1–3). Nara and Nārāyaṇa play the decisive role in the account of the churning of the ocean (1.17.18ff.) and they

¹³⁸ van Buitenen 1964.

¹³⁹ See Anne-Marie Esnoul (1979: 10, 50 and 59).

are often termed the two *r̥ṣis* (*naranārāyaṇāv r̥ṣī*, 1.21.5d, 3.13.39d, 84.5d, 5.48.5d, 95.2d, 6.62.12d, 7.57.67d, 12.126.5b, 326.91b, 331.18b and 334.3b). Any mention of the pair Nara and Nārāyaṇa in the *Mahābhārata* implies the eternity and perfection of their friendship: it is said that as a pair they are born age after age ‘for the sake of the maintenance of the world’ (*lokayātravidhānārtham*, 7.172.81), although here Nārāyaṇa is said to have created Nara by his austerities (7.172.80). 7.10.38 states that Arjuna is Kṛṣṇa’s self and Kṛṣṇa is Arjuna’s self, while verse 41 speaks of Nara and Nārāyaṇa as one self that has been made twofold. Their friendship in a sense parallels but inverts the mythical alliance between Indra and Viṣṇu (as in the simile *indraviṣṇū yathā* applied to them at 7.57.81c).¹⁴⁰ The identification of Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa with Nara and Nārāyaṇa seems to be linked with the worship of Nārāyaṇa by the Pāñcarātrins or a closely related group, according to Ruth Katz.¹⁴¹

The 18 chapters of the *Nārāyaṇīya* (12.321–339)¹⁴² are primarily devoted to the Pāñcarātra movement, which, in its devotional aspect, is close to the atmosphere of the *Bhagavadgītā*. In general, the *Nārāyaṇīya* promulgates a doctrine which, though characterised by *ahimsā* and *bhakti* worship of a supreme deity and tending in the direction of the Vāsudeva cult, is not identical with that proclaimed by Kṛṣṇa in the *Bhagavadgītā* (though referring back to it, e.g. 12.336.8cd).¹⁴³ The *bhakti* of both doctrines is broadly the same, but the *Nārāyaṇīya* attaches special value to rites, sacrifices, *tapas* and *yoga*. The dating of the *Nārāyaṇīya* is uncertain but clearly later than the *Bhagavadgītā* and probably no earlier than the 3rd century A.D.¹⁴⁴ It is a curious blend

¹⁴⁰ Other instances of Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa being identified as Nara and Nārāyaṇa occur at 2.60.26, 3.45.18, 5.48.18cd–19ab, 94.42, 109.4, 5.54.1–2, 71.13, 8.12.16, 63.54 and 13.154.52–53, also 3.193*, 6 App. 1.36 and 7.417*.

¹⁴¹ Katz 1989: 220.

¹⁴² The Critical Edition in fact has 19 *adhyāyas* since, against the majority of the manuscript evidence, it divides 329 and 330 (24 manuscripts have no colophon at this point, while 6 read one). In view of the significance of the number 18 in the tradition, this total is almost certainly intended.

¹⁴³ On the use in the *Mahābhārata* (and also the *Rāmāyaṇa*) of the term *bhakti* to denote loyalty or affection towards one’s fellows as well as to a deity, and of *bhagavat* for various gods, see Hopkins 1911.

¹⁴⁴ George Grierson (1908a) gave perhaps the first summary and analysis of the *Nārāyaṇīya* and the origins of the Bhāgavata cult. Richard Garbe (1914) dealt with supposed Christian elements in the *Mahābhārata*, including the Śvetadvīpa episode, and identified the milk-ocean with Lake Balkhash, suggesting that the legend might refer to Nestorian communities settled there in the 6th century. However, Kasten

of Upaniṣadic monism, yogic tendencies, quasi-Sāṃkhya dualism and brāhmaṇical ritualism with a devotional worship of a personal god, seeking to expound a consistent philosophical system but doing so in the style of mythological imagery; an elaborate simile proclaims it the essence of the whole *Mahābhārata* (12.332.2–4). A recent study has shown how the text is built up from several separate passages by association of ideas rather than logical progression, indicating oral improvisation, despite the general lateness of the text.¹⁴⁵

The *Nārāyaṇīya* account of *bhakti* declares that the supreme deity Nārāyaṇa is gracious to those who are devoted to him with their whole soul and they attain to the highest goal, which is Vāsudeva; this path of *bhakti* is superior to that of knowledge and is very dear to Nārāyaṇa. Nārāyaṇa himself proclaimed it, although, being eternal, it repeatedly disappears from view whenever the world is dissolved into the unmanifest. The supreme Lord is gratified by acts that are well-performed and accomplished with a full knowledge of duties and in which there is no injury to any creature. He is ever complete and yet without parts; he is the soul in all creatures, transcending the five basic elements; he is the mind that directs and controls the five senses. He is the Ordainer of the universe and the Creator, who is both active and inactive. Those who are devoted to Nārāyaṇa with their whole soul are full of universal compassion, are endowed with knowledge of the soul, are always employed in doing good to others, and are desireless. It is only they who succeed in attaining to the region of the highest of the deities. By thinking of Puruṣottama, the foremost of beings, those who are devoted to Nārāyaṇa with their whole soul acquire great wisdom. Such a person attains to the highest end, to emancipation which has Nārāyaṇa for its soul. The individual on whom Nārāyaṇa looks with compassion succeeds in becoming awakened (from the sleep of ignorance and darkness, 12.349).

Although the Nārāyaṇa and Bhāgavata movements probably had different origins, in course of time they amalgamated and when this combined *bhakti* religion was then absorbed by the broader Vaiṣṇava tradition, Vāsudeva and Nārāyaṇa were, like Kṛṣṇa of the *Bhagavad-gītā*, identified with and sometimes replaced by Viṣṇu. In the *Nārāyaṇīya*

Rönnow (1928–30) rejected Garbe's theory and discussed parallels in the *Mahābhārata* stories of Ekata, Dvita and Trita, Arjuna's inability to conquer Harivarṣa on his *digvijaya* in the North (Mbh. 2.25) and the Alexander Romance.

¹⁴⁵ Andreas Bock-Raming 1992.

the name of Kṛṣṇa is not very prominent—as noted above, he is one of the forms of Nārāyaṇa born as Dharma's son, 12.321.9—but the bearer of his patronymic Vāsudeva is the central figure of a religion which was explained to his true *bhakta* Nārada (cf. 12.332.1ff.) by Nārāyaṇa himself in Śvetadvīpa: Vāsudeva is the Supreme Soul, the inner ruler of all, and his religion is the single-focused (*ekāntika*) Bhāgavata faith. It is also in the *Nārāyanīya* that Bhagavān Nārāyaṇa, the Supreme Soul pervading the entire universe, is considered the promulgator and preceptor of the Pāñcarātra system (12.337.63ff.).¹⁴⁶ All but one of the occurrences of the term *pāñcarātra* in the *Mahābhārata* are found in the *Nārāyanīya* (12.321–339).

Within the *Mahābhārata*, the theory of divine expansions (*vyūha*) characteristic of the Pāñcarātra system is presented in detail only in the *Nārāyanīya*. Elsewhere there are only two explicit references in the text to the *vyūha* doctrine: at 6.61.42–70, in his request to Nārāyaṇa to appear on earth, Brahmā details the successive appearance of the *vyūhas* (61.65–66, cf. also 62.39) and similarly at 13.143.37 Bhīṣma tells Yudhiṣṭhīra that Kṛṣṇa is Vāsudeva who becomes the other three *vyūhas*.¹⁴⁷ There is also possibly an indirect reference elsewhere in the *Sāntiparvan* (at 12.271.60–62). From a cosmogonic perspective the doctrine attempts to explain the insertion in time of the non-temporal absolute: beneath Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa, an immutable totality, personal but not far removed from the Brahman of the Upaniṣads, can be distinguished four *vyūhas* which take charge of creation and protect the created world. The term *vyūha* seems to imply an arrangement of the parts in a coherent whole. Of the four manifestations, the first, Vāsudeva, is presented as superior to the other three. Vāsudeva gives rise to Saṃkarṣaṇa, from whom emanates Pradyumna, who in turn fathers Aniruddha; from this point the gross creation begins through the intervention of Brahmā who thus regains his traditional role as demiurge. All activity belongs to the four divine forms; another typical trait is that the text assimilates them to the constituent principles of Sāṃkhya. However, Nārāyaṇa, being immutable by nature,

¹⁴⁶ For a translation and analysis of the contents of the *Nārāyanīya* see Esnoul 1979; Nārada's vision of Nārāyaṇa (12.326) is also discussed and translated by Laine (1989: 190–201). A major collaborative study of the *Nārāyanīya* is about to be published, containing contributions by Reinhold Grünendahl, Angelika Malinar, Thomas Oberlies and Peter Schreiner (Schreiner 1997).

¹⁴⁷ More doubtfully there is the use of *caturvyūha* as a name of Viṣṇu in the *Viṣṇu-sahasranāmastrotra* (*caturātmā caturvyūhaś caturdaṁstraś caturbhujah*, 13.135.28ab).

eludes all efforts of human—or even divine—knowledge, except when, by special favour, he reveals himself to one of his devotees. From each *vyūha* in the developed system descend three sub-*vyūhas* (*vyūhāntara*), named after aspects of Viṣṇu, who preside over the twelve months and important elements of *yantras*; however, the first occurrence of the twelve *vyūhas* is in the *Anusāsanaparvan* (13.109.3–14) and in the *Baudhāyana Dharmasūtra*.

The basic theory seems to have evolved sometime in the 1st–2nd century A.D., the period when the doctrine of *avatāras* was also in a formative stage. It may have developed in Kashmir, where it is held that the earliest texts of the Pāñcarātra school were later written, and perhaps finds a Zoroastrian parallel in the relation of Ahura Mazdāh to Spenta Mainyu, his Effective Spirit, and in the Fravašis. It is perhaps relevant in this regard that the term Harimedhas occurs five times in the *Nārāyaṇiya* to designate Nārāyaṇa (at 323.12d, 325.4,¹³³ 335.8b, 336.28b and 337.54b—on all but the second occasion in combination with *deva*), since this has plausibly been seen as a Sanskritisation of the Avestan Ahura Mazdāh.¹⁴⁸ In addition, the seven Citraśikhanḍin sages, Marīci, Atri, Angiras, Pulastyā, Pulaha, Kratu and Vasiṣṭha (12.322.26–27, cf. 804* 2 and 323.3), have more speculatively been linked with the seven Ameśa Spenta, while the sages Ekata, Dvita and Trita have definite Iranian analogues.

The *vyūha* theory is an interesting doctrine, combining as it does a particular cosmological/psychological view with a devotional religion focused on the person of Kṛṣṇa. Its philosophical basis is obviously that of the eight *prakṛtis* and deity/*puruṣa*. It differs from the standard descriptions of the eight *prakṛtis* in that the first three (*jīva*, *manas*, *ahamkāra*) not only deviate from the usual series *buddhi*, *ahamkāra* and *manas*, in name as well as in function, but that they are put in a very close relation to the *puruṣa*/Vāsudeva, a relation so close that they can be described as forms of the deity. Nevertheless, the three are different, as the kinship pattern clearly indicates. The fact that the deity is called Vāsudeva and the *jīva* Saṃkarṣaṇa suggests that some sort of independent coexistence of the deity and the individual soul was accepted, since Saṃkarṣaṇa is Kṛṣṇa's half-brother, not his son, who is Pradyumna; equally, this may show that at one stage the relation between *jīva* and *manas* was not viewed as a simple cause-effect relation, since Saṃkarṣaṇa (*jīva*) is not the father of Pradyumna (*manas*).¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁸ The identification was first made by Jatindra Mohan Chatterji (1948–49).

¹⁴⁹ These points are taken from van Buitenen 1964: 294–95.

The first seven chapters of the *Nārāyaṇīya* insist on the inaccessibility of the supreme deity who cannot be approached either by sacrifices or austerities, but only by concentrating one's thought on him, which in turn brings the gift of his grace (12.321.5–6). Mingled with this theological assertion is the description of a mysterious white continent (*Śvetadvīpa*, north of the Kṣīrodadhi, 12.322.8–10) inhabited by beings equally white who adore this Nārāyaṇa, who is invisible to all but his exclusive devotees. At the same time an opposition is outlined between traditional religion, that of the Vedic sacrifice (*pravṛtti*), and the religious practice favoured in certain milieux, *nivṛtti*, that is the suspension of ritual activity, replaced by the intensity of meditation and devotion to the one deity beyond all his manifestations.

The story of Nārada's journey is introduced by an account of another journey by the three sages, Ekata, Dvita and Trita, to Śvetadvīpa in order to see the Lord in his own form; one purpose of this story is to show that only the one who is favoured by the deity's grace is worthy of seeing him (12.323.18). After practising extreme austerity for thousands of years, the three sages hear a disembodied voice, which describes this mystical location to the north of the Milk Ocean, Śvetadvīpa, the White Island; its inhabitants are intent on the Lord, self-controlled, unwinking and are destined to merge into the eternal being. Finally the voice urges them to go there, since he has revealed himself there. When the three sages arrive, they can see nothing, since they are blinded by the dazzling splendour of the supreme Puruṣa. They perform further *tapas* and then are able to see the silver-hued inhabitants in their meditations on Nārāyaṇa. A great light equal in brightness to a thousand suns suddenly appears again and is worshipped by the inhabitants, who are able to see the form of the Lord himself within the light, while the three sages are rendered senseless by the mere illusion of the Lord. The disembodied voice advises them again that only through single-minded devotion can one see the supreme.

Nārada's visit is more successful than that of the three sages. On arrival at Śvetadvīpa he too sees its inhabitants, who shine like the moon, and pays them honour; he then praises the Lord in a lengthy *stotra* (12.325.4, which contains, however, many more than the presumably intended 108 names of the deity) and gains a vision of his cosmic or universal form (*viśvarūpa*). Nārāyaṇa then explains that Nārada, because of his single-minded devotion, has been able to obtain this vision. As they converse, the Lord declares that the silver-hued inhabitants of Śvetadvīpa are realised beings (*siddhas*), freed from the

gunas of *rajas* and *tamas*, who will undoubtedly enter into the supreme Puruṣa and become liberated (12.326.18–24). The supreme reality, the eternal Self, cannot be seen by the eye or the other senses but only by knowledge. It is without qualities or compounding, beyond all duality, and incomprehensible to Nārada, since he is not yet fit to know the Lord fully. Whereas all elements eventually dissolve back into *prakṛti* and *prakṛti* into Puruṣa, Puruṣa is eternal, the one, beyond which there is nothing. Thus, although Nārada is more successful than the three sages, he does not quite reach the final goal.

In fact this doctrine of *ekānta*, the worship of the One, seems to be summed up in the first six or rather seven chapters; the later chapters appear to be glosses on the themes enunciated at the beginning, interspersed with legends, at first sight miscellaneous but actually carefully chosen to exalt the deity, to reveal his multiple forms and the activities to which they correspond. The idea that the first seven chapters form a unit is strengthened by the inclusion of a *phalaśruti* at the end of them (12.327.107). There are, however, formal grounds also for considering that this first part stops at the end of the 6th chapter, since before chapter 7, which repeats the material of 6, the dialogue of Bhīṣma and Yudhiṣṭhīra is brought to an end until after the end of the whole of the *Nārāyaṇīya* and Sauti abruptly resumes his personal narration and reports the discourse of the Lord directly to the sage Nārada.¹⁵⁰

Although both the terms Bhāgavata and Pāñcarātra are used to designate the followers of Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa in general, some texts distinguish between them; a Southern insertion into the *Anuśāsanaparvan* implicitly distinguishes the knowers of Pañcarātra, the Bhāgavatas and the Vaikhānasas, who follow Vedic practices (13.412*). The difference seems to be that, whereas the Bhāgavatas accepted the brāhmaṇical social order, the Pāñcarātras were indifferent, or even hostile, to it; also, the name Nārāyaṇa seems particularly connected to the Pāñcarātra system. They were all monotheistic devotees of Viṣṇu, but the Pāñcarātra school seems to have had additional or supplementary literature and ritual. They emphasised the *vyūha* doctrine and tried for as long as possible to reconcile it with the *avatāra* doctrine which was eventually to prevail. They were less inclined to set their doctrines in a Sāṃkhya framework and their later ritual texts show that they favoured practices of a tantric nature which were probably

¹⁵⁰ Cf. Esnoul 1979: 20–21 and 43–45.

widespread but were not acceptable initially in the more brāhmaṇical style of Vaiṣṇavism. Indeed, the juxtaposition of Pāñcarātra with Sāṃkhya, Yoga and Pāśupata (12.326.100, 337.1, 62–3), references to the esoteric nature of its doctrine, and indications about the ascetic life of its adherents, strongly suggest that the Pāñcarātra way of life was typical of those seekers after enlightenment whose beliefs and practices were rather opposed to Vedic ritualism.

The *Nārāyanīya* describes such worshippers as Sātvatas, Bhāgavatas, Pāñcarātras and Ekāntins (e.g. 12.322.19, 24, 324.1, 336.1–7).¹⁵¹ The term Sātvata originally applied to the clan among whom Kṛṣṇa was born and presumably, when his cult spread to other communities, the name of his clansmen became a general term for his worshippers. The term Ekāntin, ‘exclusive worshipper’, apparently distinguishes the devotees of Nārāyaṇa from the followers of Vāsudeva, who was worshipped together with associates, and at one point the superiority of the Ekāntins over such worshippers of Puruṣottama (i.e. Vāsudeva) is clearly stated (12.336.1–4). These Ekāntins include, among others, Nārada and King Uparicara Vasu who is cursed by the sages for supporting the gods’ claim to animals killed in sacrifice but through his earnest devotion to Viṣṇu earns his grace and regains his power to soar to sublime heights. One can become a Pañcarātrin only by learning the entire teaching of the *Pāñcarātra Mahopaniṣad* (12.326.100) and observing its prescriptions.

There is evidence that some at least of the wandering ascetics who from about the 6th century B.C. went about teaching or settled down to a life of contemplation observed a restriction of five nights stay at a time in a town. Possibly therefore the name *pāñcarātrika* originally referred to an itinerant religious recluse following this five-night rule, regardless of doctrinal allegiance, but was later applied especially to devotees of Nārāyaṇa or Kṛṣṇa, and Pañcarātra was reinterpreted as the name of the tradition they followed.¹⁵² This explanation of the name seems more plausible than that which postulates a relationship with the *pāñcarātram sattram* mentioned in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (13.6.1.1) and identified as the Puruṣamedha. Walter Neevel, however, proposes another interpretation of the name, arguing that ‘this

¹⁵¹ The term Bhāgavata also, for example, occurs at *Harivamśa* 70.10c, 29b, 34d and 787*. In the *Mahābhārata* itself a rare alternative for Bhāgavata is *bhagavadbhakta* (e.g. 1.206.2c).

¹⁵² This is the suggestion of van Buitenen (1964: 195).

great Upaniṣad . . . entitled Pañcarātra' of 12.326.100 (a+d = *idam mahopaniṣadam . . . pañcarātrānuśabdītam*) refers to the preceding instruction given by Nārāyaṇa to Nārada in 12.321.27–326.97 and that the term is meant as a descriptive title for this Upaniṣad or secret dialogue, which should therefore indicate the meaning by its content. In this text only one set of five receives special emphasis and detailed analysis, the five material elements (*bhūtas*), which in the manifestation (*sṛṣti*) of the universe combine to form what is termed the physical 'body' (*śarīra*). Moreover, there is only one use of an image of 'night', a somewhat indirect use but one that is again central to the content of the dialogue: Nārāyaṇa twice likens himself to the Sun in the sky and likens the dissolution (*pralaya*) or withdrawal of the physical universe into himself to the setting of the sun at night. Thus, it seems clear to Neevel that in the *Nārāyanīya*, our earliest specifically Pañcarātra source, Pañcarātra means 'the Night (i.e. the dissolution) of the Five [Physical Elements]' and is a symbolic image for *mokṣa*, release from bondage to the physical body (*śarīra*) and the attainment of union with the godhead Nārāyaṇa by means of knowledge (*vidyā*) revealed in this great Upaniṣad entitled Pañcarātra.¹⁵³

Ruth Katz speculates that the poets responsible for the Sauptika episode in its present form were adherents or forerunners of the Pāñcarātra, on the grounds that the night raid, followed by the *brahmaśiras* part of the episode, represent the 'night' (*rātra*) of the compound Pañcarātra. She argues that this symbolism would correspond well with Neevel's interpretation as 'the night of the five'; in the night raid, the five who are destroyed are the five shadowy Draupadeyas or, alternatively, Pāñcālas. 'Perhaps some Pāñcarātrins picked up this tale as an illustration of their doctrine, identifying the archenemy of the Pāñcālas, Aśvatthāman, with Śiva; if so, they could have been attracted to it particularly because the name Pāñcāla fits so beautifully into their "five" symbolism. Between Pāñcālas and Pāñcarātrins the five Pāñdavas mediate perfectly; so perfectly that it is impossible to determine whether their fivefold count is influenced by the one group or the other, both, or neither. . . . Strikingly, the very sages who dominate the *Nārāyanīya*, Nārada and Vyāsa, play major roles in the *Sauptika* episode as well.'¹⁵⁴

Despite the fact that the developed Pāñcarātra system is primarily

¹⁵³ Neevel 1977: 8–9.

¹⁵⁴ Katz 1989: 253.

concerned with ritual practice, there is very little evidence for this side of it in the text of the *Mahābhārata*, even in the *Nārāyaṇīya*. Mention is made in the *Āśvamedhikaparvan* of a *cakradhara* ascetic who could disappear at will and go anywhere he liked, thus by implication attesting the practice of branding Viṣṇu's weapons, the *cakra* (discus) and *śankha* (conch), on the arms of the initiate, which is recommended by the Pāñcarātra Samhitās; the sect attached great importance to the *cakra*, the wheel or discus which denotes Viṣṇu's will to be, to evolve and to maintain the universe. However, a lengthy addition by the Southern recension to the end of this *parvan* (either as its last part or even outside it),¹⁵⁵ the *Vaiṣṇavadharmaśāstra* (14 App. 4), is a purely sectarian and indeed specifically Pāñcarātra text which covers practically all aspects of ritual and practice. At one point (lines 1652–75), in answer to Yudhiṣṭhira's question about how the Vaikhānasas and the Pāñcarātrikas worship the deity's *mūrtis*, Kṛṣṇa gives successively the five forms of the Vaikhānasa tradition (Puruṣa, Satya, Acyuta and Aniruddha, with Viṣṇu himself) and the four forms of the Pāñcarātrikas (*caturmūrti*: Vāsudeva, Saṃkarṣaṇa, Pradyumna, Aniruddha). In the section called *Agnihotrapraśāṃsā* (lines 2539–2748) it even details the fire cult, which is a prominent feature of the Pāñcarātra Samhitās. Other topics that it covers include the *varṇāśrama-dharma*, the nature of the three-fold *dāna*, praise of brāhmans and devotees of the deities, and the five *mahāyajñas*.

Regarding the dating and spread of these movements, inscriptional evidence helps to render more precise the *Mahābhārata* material, even though it is much more meagre in quantity. In addition to the instances adduced in the section on Kṛṣṇa above and in the next chapter on the *Harivamśa*, the following items may be mentioned. An inscription from Ghosūndī or Nagarī (ancient Madhyamika, 8 miles from Chittor, Rājasthān) of the 1st century B.C. refers to the construction of a *pūjāśilaprākāra* (stone enclosure for worship) by a King Sarvatāta (perhaps one of the Kāṇvas), a Bhāgavata performer of the *āśvamedha*, in honour of Saṃkarṣaṇa and Vāsudeva, who are called Bhagavat, *anīhata* (unconquered) and *sarvesvara*, in the compound of the god Nārāyaṇa

¹⁵⁵ This passage is also known by the shorter name of *Vaiṣṇavadharma* and is inserted by T G after 14.96.15 and by M2–4 after the final colophon of 14.96. The pretext for it is that after the *āśvamedha* sacrifice Yudhiṣṭhira asks Kṛṣṇa to describe the Vaiṣṇava *dharma* in all its aspects. It shares a good part of its material with the *Viṣṇudharmāḥ*, as Grünendahl has demonstrated (*Viṣṇudharmāḥ* 1983–89).

(*nārāyaṇavāṭikā*).¹⁵⁶ During the rule of the Śaka satraps, Mathurā seems to have been a major seat of the cult, for we know from inscriptions that at least two temples of Bhagavat Vāsudeva existed in the Mathurā area in the time of Śoḍasa (c. 150 A.D.). A number of icons and sculptures of Vaiṣṇava themes datable to the Kuṣāṇa period have also been found in the Mathurā region; one of these is a colossal statue that has been identified as Bhagavān Nārāyaṇa because of its ascetic symbolism.¹⁵⁷ The Nānāghāṭ inscription of the Sātavāhana queen Nāyanikā, recording her husband Śātakarṇī's sacrifices (including two *aśvamedhas* and a *rājasūya*), begins with an invocation to the gods Dharma, Indra, Saṃkarṣaṇa, Vāsudeva, the Moon and the Sun, and the four *lokapālas* Yama, Varuṇa, Kubera and Vāsava. This shows the spread of the Bhāgavata cult to the Western Deccan by early in the 1st century A.D., and also indicates that some people viewed Vāsudeva, not as the greatest of the gods, but as an equal to Indra and others. A later Sātavāhana ruler, Vāsiṣṭhiputra Puṇumāvi, in the Nāsik cave inscription of 149 A.D., claimed to be equal to Rāma and Keśava (Balarāma and Kṛṣṇa). The further spread southwards of the cult of Vāsudeva is shown by the Chinna (Krishnā District) inscription of Gautamiputra Yajñaśrī dated in the 27th year of his reign (c. 200 A.D.) which begins with an adoration of Bhagavat Vāsudeva.

Epic Sāṃkhya and Yoga

In the long-standing debate about the origins of Sāṃkhya and Yoga, two main positions have been adopted. One view sees them as ancient, non-brāhmaṇical systems that pre-date the rise of Buddhism, while the opposite view is that Sāṃkhya and Yoga as philosophical systems can hardly be attested before the *Sāṃkhyakārikā* of Iśvarakṛṣṇa and the *Yogaśūtra* of Patañjali, and so, rather than being at the start of Indian philosophy, they are late, derivative systems influenced by the Upaniṣads, early Buddhism, the *Mokṣadharma* and the *Bhagavadgītā*. Probably, the reality of the situation lies somewhere in between: these

¹⁵⁶ The builder of the massive enclosure had no less than three versions of this inscription incised in bold Brāhmī script on massive stone blocks (two now in Udaipur Government Museum, one still *in situ*); cf. Doris Srinivasan 1981.

¹⁵⁷ Srinivasan 1978–79 (cf. also Srinivasan 1989b: 389).

were indeed ancient trends of thought which owed much to groups outside Vedic orthodoxy and for which texts such as the Upaniṣads and the *Mokṣadharma* are valuable sources of information, but they cannot be regarded as fully-fledged systems before the time of Iśvarakṛṣṇa and Patañjali.

Starting in the 1920s, Eric Frauwallner examined in detail the treatises of the *Mokṣadharma*, dividing them into the two categories of Sāṃkhya and non-Sāṃkhya (including—perhaps questionably—the Yoga passages).¹⁵⁸ In his examination of epic Sāṃkhya Frauwallner assesses its views on the human psyche, the three *guṇas*, *mahat*, the cycles of time and the evolution of the elements, seeking in this way to establish the earliest forms of Sāṃkhya philosophy. He also looks at the possibility of links with Buddhism but concludes that there is little evidence of mutual influence. One issue is the precise meaning of some of the terms; there are several contexts in which *sāṃkhya* and *yoga* seem to mean little more than theory and practice respectively and Edgerton has rightly insisted that to assume the existence of the systems whenever the terms occur in the *Mokṣadharma*, *Bhagavadgītā* and other early texts is to commit a fundamental error in historical judgement.¹⁵⁹ In all of these texts the terms refer not so much to philosophical positions as to spiritual methodologies. For example, Vasiṣṭha in his discourse to Karāla Janaka (12.291–296) defines Yoga in terms of *ekāgratā* and *prāṇāyāma* (12.294.8) and affirms that the basis of Sāṃkhya is discrimination and enumeration (12.294.41); this passage incidentally preserves the older scheme of the eightfold *prakṛti*, which here (294.27–29) and at 298.10–12 (within the dialogue between Yājñavalkya and Janaka, 12.298–306) comprises *avyakta*, *buddhi*, *ahamkāra* and the five gross elements, although slight variants occur elsewhere (for example 12.267.16 and BhG. 6.4).

In the *Mokṣadharma* various names of ancient teachers are associated with the early period of Sāṃkhya, including Kapila, Āsuri, Bhṛgu, Yājñavalkya, Sanatkumāra, Vasiṣṭha, Śuka, Jaigīṣavya, Asita Devala, Vyāsa, Janaka and Pañcaśikha (for example, 12.306.58–62). Some of these can be traced back to the older Upaniṣads and many of them also appear in the later Purāṇic literature; however, the doctrines

¹⁵⁸ Frauwallner 1925–26; also Frauwallner 1953: I, 275–408. A useful survey of scholarship on epic Sāṃkhya is contained in Gerald Larson's study (1979: especially chapters 1–2).

¹⁵⁹ Edgerton 1965: 35–48 and 255–334 (quotation from p. 36 at the end of the next paragraph).

attributed to them are not necessarily specific to Sāṃkhya—for example, Jaigīṣavya merely advocates equanimity of mind in his response to Asita Devala at 12.222 and Kapila expounds the desirability of renunciation at 12.261. Three of these teachers are often referred to later (for example, in the *Sāṃkhyakārikā* and its commentaries) as important precursors of the developed Sāṃkhya system: Kapila, Āsuri and Pañcaśikha. Almost all primary literature from the time when Sāṃkhya was a living philosophy has been lost but the philosophical passages of the *Mahābhārata*, as well as some later Upaniṣads, were probably composed during the time when Sāṃkhya schools were flourishing. Although these epic passages cannot be regarded as primary sources for knowledge about the system, they do include ideas current at their time—as the Purāṇas do later. They may even have preserved some small texts used in the schools for instruction, but their outlook is not the same as that of the philosophical schools. That is why, for example, the word *sāṃkhya* has a distinctive meaning in the epic, “the method of gaining salvation by ‘knowledge’”, as Edgerton puts it.

The Sāṃkhya cosmology was frequently utilised by other authors and schools and so non-Sāṃkhya texts often incorporate Sāṃkhya ideas, most famously in the *Bhagavadgītā*. However, the system as attested in texts of the early period is atheistic and, when this is coupled with the general resemblance between it and Jainism, the most plausible view is that both Sāṃkhya and Yoga originated, at least in part, in the same milieu as the unorthodox systems. In both, the goal of *mokṣa* is significantly termed *kaivalya*, which has traditionally been interpreted as ‘aloneness, isolation’ of the selves both from *prakṛti* and from each other, as self-contained monads. Whereas Jainism regards all empirical connexion of the self with non-self as real but defiling, Sāṃkhya regards it as altogether an illusion. Basically, that is, the goal is conceived negatively: as release from suffering, as migration from the embrace of the phenomenal world and the ego.

An early form of Sāṃkhya is presented at 12.187 = 12.239–40, on which Frauwallner bases his interpretation of the earliest Sāṃkhya, which lacks both an evolutionary doctrine and the *guna* theory, seeing it as ‘der epischen Grundtext des Sāṃkhya’.¹⁶⁰ In fact, in the varying

¹⁶⁰ Frauwallner 1925–26: II, 179–80. In the Bombay edition there are three versions of this passage but its 12.286[5] is lacking in several manuscripts and its readings are given by the Critical Edition in App. II.1 as variants to 12.187. It is translated by Edgerton (1965: 256–60), and analysed by van Buitenen (1956).

usage of the terms *bhāva* and *guṇa*, there are traces of a synthesis between ancient cosmological speculations and yogic theories of evolution. It is also noteworthy that *ahamkāra* is absent throughout; since this principle usually appears in enumerations of Sāṃkhya *tattvas* in the *Mokṣadharma* and is found already in Aśvaghoṣa's treatment of Sāṃkhya, this argues for an early date for this text-group. In addition, as Frauwallner has indicated, the fact that this text-group is textually so corrupt is another indication of an early date.

Frauwallner suggests three stages of development of Sāṃkhya before Īśvarakṛṣṇa's classical formulation of it. In the first, seen in the passage just discussed, analysis begins with the five gross elements, to which are related the five sense organs, *manas*, *buddhi* and *kṣetrajña*. All except *kṣetrajña* belong to material reality, which is called *sattva*. Frauwallner traces this dualistic concept back to speculations on the self in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* and in particular to Yājñavalkya's teachings in which the self is seen as distinct from all phenomenal reality. Also, in this early speculation, *guṇas* are called *bhāvas* and are basically psychical qualities: *sattva* (goodness), *rajas* (passion) and *tamas* (dullness). Frauwallner suggests that this stage is broadly contemporary with the rise of Buddhism. His second stage sees the theory of evolution being introduced and the classical notion of *prakṛti* and the three *guṇas* being developed. He traces the doctrine of evolution to the speculations about the ages and periods of the world as they emerge from Brahmā, identifying the *Śukānupraśna* (12.224–247) as an example of such speculation. This stage is assigned to Pañcaśikha, who is also credited with adding the notion of *ahamkāra* and standardising the *tattvas* at 25. Frauwallner's third stage sees the addition of various further doctrines and was probably spread over a long period. He sees the introduction of the sixty topics (which include the ten basic principles dealing with the nature of *puruṣa* and *prakṛti* and the fifty *bhāvas*, attributed to Vārṣaganya) as being of major significance for Sāṃkhya psychology.

Occasional fragments in later texts are attributed to this Pañcaśikha, who is also sometimes referred to as the author of a massive verse treatise on Sāṃkhya philosophy called *Saṣṭitantra*. But the views attributed to Pañcaśikha in the *Mokṣadharma* seem quite different from the views that can be pieced together from the fragments, suggesting either that there was more than one Pañcaśikha or that the name Pancaśikha was simply a respected one, to which a variety of views could be ascribed. The main passage is the *Pañcaśikhavākyā* (12.211–212), with

which may be compared the account of Sāṃkhya given in the *Caraka-saṃhitā*.¹⁶¹ This identifies Kapila, the mythical founder of Sāṃkhya, with Prajāpati at 12.211.9 in a manner reminiscent of *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* 5.2, where Kapila being born in the beginning (*kapilam . . . agre . . . jayamānam*) is Hiranyaagarbha. Incidentally, Kapila himself, in addition to this identification with Prajāpati and his expounding of the desirability of renunciation at 12.26, is also mentioned in 12.337 by Vaiśampāyana as the promulgator of Sāṃkhya. The *Pañcaśikhvākya* then records that Pañcaśikha, the first or leading pupil of Āsuri, was celebrating a 1000-year sacrifice when the great doctrine of Kapila appeared before him in an aura of human form (*maṇḍalam puruṣāvastham*) and imparted to him *avyakta*—the highest truth, after which Pañcaśikha realised the distinction between *kṣetra* and *kṣetrajña* (12.211.10–12). Despite Frauwallner's arguments, both Pañcaśikha and Caraka accept 24 rather than 25 principles, although in 12.308 a system of thirty *tattvas* understood theistically is ascribed to Pañcaśikha. Janaka's questions to Pañcaśikha in 212.2–4 about the desirability of release are interesting, since they appear to suggest the inadequacy of *mokṣa* achieved through Sāṃkhya from a Vedāntin standpoint, which is echoed by Pañcaśikha himself (212.40–44), from which Hopkins concluded that the whole passage is a ‘brahmaist’ reworking of an older Sāṃkhya text.¹⁶² Certainly, in these verses Pañcaśikha declares that the *kṣetrajña* is eternal but loses its individuality on gaining *mokṣa*, just as rivers flow into the sea.

The *Śāntiparvan* also contains as the first chapter of the *Śukānuprāśna* a cosmogonic text (12.224) which perhaps predates the Christian era, according to Hacker.¹⁶³ This served as a model for the kind of teaching manual, composed at the latest in the 3rd century A.D., which expounded the evolution of the world according to a form of the Sāṃkhya system and is largely preserved in different versions in seven of the Purāṇas. Its system differs from that propounded by the *Sāṃkhya-kārikā* in that *avyakta*, the unevolved cause or primary matter, is distinct from *pradhāna*, the first product of its evolution; the evolution of

¹⁶¹ Aśvaghoṣa's *Buddhacarita* 12.15–44 (1st century A.D.) contains quite a systematic account of Sāṃkhya, which shows similarities to both of these. A summary of the *Mahābhārata* passage will be found in Bedekar 1957.

¹⁶² Hopkins 1924: 151.

¹⁶³ Hacker 1961. It is also of interest to note that this *adhyāya* is over twice the average length at 75 verses, whereas the final *adhyāyas* of the *Śukānuprāśna* (241–47) are much shorter than average.

the *tanmātras* is combined with that of the gross elements; the ten senses are the products of *taijasa* emanation; and the *manas* seems not to have been mentioned in the oldest form of the text. Klaus Rüping has now shown that the sources for the mention of seven *puruṣas* here (224.41) are the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* 2.1 (in which the five elements arise directly from the *ātman* and give rise to the *puruṣa*) and *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 6.1.1.2ff. (dealing with seven separate *puruṣas* which unite to form one *puruṣa*, the creator Prajāpati).¹⁶⁴

Pure Sāṃkhya—epic as well as classical—was *anīśvara* in contrast to Yoga, though not denying the existence of the Vedic gods, even if some epic Sāṃkhya teachers seem to have had doubts about the Vedas being the source of philosophical knowledge (12.205.30). Evidence for this can be found in 12.289; here *sāṃkhyayoga* is clearly differentiated from other kinds of Yoga and it is stated that Sāṃkhya is non-theistic, emphasises knowledge as the only means of salvation, and relies mainly on accepted teaching as a means of knowledge; Yoga, on the other hand, is theistic, emphasises the power and strength of bodily discipline, and relies primarily on immediate perception as a means of knowledge; the passage also declares at verse 9 that the ‘views’ (*darśana*) are not the same in the two systems, although it is not made clear just what this means. However, some of the passages which assert a 26th principle do not imply the later Yoga notion of a lord as a kind of super-soul, but rather mean the *puruṣa* or *kṣetrajña* in its enlightened state (e.g. 12.296.11), and in several passages a non-theistic doctrine seems clearly implied: for example, in 12.241.1 the *kṣetrajña* is equated with the *īśvara*. Nevertheless, in the *Bhagavadgītā* the tendency is to relate the highest principle which is beyond the 25 to Kṛṣṇa.

The *Mokṣadharma* contains a fuller account of the theistic form of Sāṃkhya than do the Upaniṣads, since several epic Sāṃkhya philosophers combined Sāṃkhya with a theistic approach, believing in Nārāyaṇa as the 26th *tattva*. It mentions three schools: those who admit 24 categories, those who admit 25, and those who correctly admit 26—the last a supreme being, as Yājñavalkya makes clear when narrating to Janaka his replies to the twenty-four questions put by the Gandharva Viśvāvasu (12.306.27–55; cf. also 12.187.37–39, 240.19–21, 296.22–26 and 303.13–18). It explains in detail the distinction between *kṣetra* and *kṣetrajña*, and this perceiving self is set

¹⁶⁴ Rüping 1977.

over against the 24 categories of *prakṛti* constituting the sphere of empirical knowledge. This perceiving self is not the real doer and enjoyer but simply the pure witness-consciousness that forms the background of our empirical existence. But both it and *prakṛti*, though independent of each other, are dependent on a further principle, *puruṣottama*, which is the final abode of the whole creation. While there are various differences from the classical Sāṃkhya, the *Mahābhārata* definitely says that all sufferings are due to false identification of *prakṛti* and *ksetrajña* and that final liberation will be effected by recognition of the distinction between spirit and matter.

Similarly Bhṛgu, in his discourse to Bharadvāja on the origins of the world, provides a basically Sāṃkhya account of the process set within the framework of Brahman emerging from Viṣṇu's navel (12.175–180). Again, the *Vārṣneyādhyātma* (12.203–210), though incorporating elements of an early form of Sāṃkhya, operates in a basically theistic framework. To his pupil's initial question about where they both had come from, its anonymous teacher replies that Vāsudeva is everything and that he causes the emanation and dissolution of the universe, being the unmanifest, eternal Brahman (203.7–9). After indicating the usefulness of Yoga techniques, the dialogue then emphasises the role of intuition in being freed from the mortal world and becoming Brahman, which is going to the blessed, unborn, divine Viṣṇu, who is called the unmanifest (210.28–30).

The *Mahābhārata* thus shows the start of the trend by which the fundamental atheism of the Sāṃkhya system was somewhat modified later, since some epic philosophy is decidedly theistic in character, with the Sāṃkhya elements present adapted to the service of theism. The clearest theistic emphasis comes in the *Bhagavadgītā*, as was indicated above. In its second chapter *sāṃkhyayoga* is delineated as a kind of Yoga which stands apart from *karmayoga*, *dhyānayoga*, and so on. In the seventh chapter a clearly theistic account of Sāṃkhyayoga is presented, while in the thirteenth chapter yet another account appears, which seems considerably later and close to the classical scheme. An important contribution of the *Bhagavadgītā* to the developed Sāṃkhya is the theory of *satkāryavāda*, since it explicitly states that the existent can never arise from the non-existent and that the non-existent can never be made existent (2.16). This principle underlies the *satkāryavāda* doctrine, which asserts the existence of the effect in the cause prior to its production: cause and effect are the undeveloped and developed states of the same substance. However, the Sāṃkhya had not assumed

its later distinctive shape even by the end of the epic period, where in fact the nearest approach to the classical system is found in the very late *Anugītā* (14.40–42), which also incorporates significant Yoga elements.

Yoga and yogins occur quite widely in the *Mahābhārata* in contexts which suggest a wider and to some extent different understanding of the terms than that found in classical Yoga.¹⁶⁵ As noted earlier in this chapter, the older *tapas* and Yoga are often linked. For example Śaunaka urges Yudhiṣṭhīra to pursue success and *yogasiddhi* by means of *tapas* (3.2.77; *tapasā siddhim anviccha* of 77c is repeated at 78c and its purpose given as support of the twice-born), holding out the example of the gods who attained their sovereignty because they possessed the power of Yoga (*yogaiśvaryena samyuktāḥ*, 3.2.76c); similarly, in the next *adhyāya*, in the late context of the 108 names of the sun, Yudhiṣṭhīra, duly resorting to austerity (*tapa āsthāya dharmena*, 3.3.12c) to support the twice-born, undertook the supreme austerity (*tapa ātiṣṭad uttamam*, 13d) and, after resorting to Yoga (*yogam āsthāya*, 14c), practised breath control (*prāṇayāmena tash्वān*, 14f). Elsewhere specific practices are linked, for example breath control and plucking out the hair (3.81.51cd, where the variant *svalomāni* seems better than the *śvalomāni* of the text). Indeed, *tapas* and other Yoga practices are often simply efficacious methods to achieve mundane ends, since they produce power which can be manipulated and used to force one's will on others, and this is a feature which persists even into the *Moksadharma-parvan* (for example, the magical power, *prabhāva*, of flying through the air mentioned at 12.312.8, or a long list of such powers at 12.228.21–37, and even simply *aṣṭagūṇam aiśvaryam* at 12.326.51c, cf. 3.388* 7).

Perhaps the two most striking features in the properly religious aspects of Yoga are the concern with techniques of dying and with ideas of light and radiance. One example is the *Sanatsujātya* (5.42–45) which begins by declaring that there is no killing or being killed and has as a refrain in its final chapter, directed towards the *puruṣa*, ‘the yogins behold him, the eternal blessed one’ (*yoginas tam prapaśyanti bhagavantam sanātanam*, 5.45.1ef etc.); analogies are obvious with the message of the *Bhagavadgītā*, the Yoga elements of which have been discussed above. Another comes in the dialogue of the brāhmaṇa and the butcher (3.198–206) where, after an exposition of the Sāṃkhya categories and the role of the *prāṇas*, the butcher declares that if one

¹⁶⁵ An early and still useful treatment is that by Hopkins (1901b).

disciplines the mind during the night, eats little and is pure of soul, one sees the self within oneself and that, as though with a lighted lamp, ones sees with the lamp of the mind that the self is separate and is then released (3.203.37–38). But the most striking example is found in the description of Drona's death.¹⁶⁶ This states that—as Drona resolves to die, abandons his weapons and applies himself to Yoga (*yogayuktavān*)—he who possesses great austerities assents to it, resorts to Yoga (*yogam āsthāya*, a standard phrase), becoming a light, and ascends to heaven; as he goes it seems to those below that there are two suns and that the atmosphere is entirely filled with lights (7.165.35–40). Although the degree of duplication within the whole account of Drona's death points to the existence of more than one layer in its narration, this particular passage shows that it has been homologated with accounts of yogic experience in terms of incomparable radiance. There are pronounced similarities to this in the account of Kṛṣṇa's death (16.5), as Schreiner demonstrates.

Descriptions of Yoga are quite frequent in the *Mokṣadharmaśarīra* and a common feature of them is a strong emphasis on discipline and meditation; as already noted, Vasiṣṭha in his discourse to Karāla Janaka defines Yoga in terms of *ekāgratā* and *prāṇāyāma* (12.294.8, cf. *prāṇāyāma* being recommended at BhG 4.29d), while he also declares that by ten or twelve *codanās*, presumably restraints of breath, one should urge the self to what is beyond the twenty-fourth (12.294.10cd, repeated in a modified context by the *Anugītā* at 14.48.4cd). In the *Dhyānayoga adhyāya* (12.188) Bhīṣma outlines to Yudhiṣṭhira the four-fold Yoga of meditation (*dhyānayogam caturvidham*, 1b), where one should collect together all the senses, fix the mind on a single point and sit like a log of wood and, after passing through further stages of meditation (*vitarka*, *vicāra* and *viveka*, 15ab) and finally withdrawing the senses through concentration, one becomes completely tranquil and gains *nirvāṇa* (22cd); this passage is echoed in *Bṛhannāradīya Purāṇa* 44.83–105. There is a marked emphasis on *dhāraṇā* in 12.228, which begins by declaring that, after the faults have been cut off one should practice the twelve Yogas (not otherwise defined here, but cf. *Manu* 12.120–121), and then launches into an extended metaphor identifying the

¹⁶⁶ On this passage, and more generally on these themes, see Brockington 1986b and Schreiner 1988b. It is also worth noting that there is quite a close parallel to the themes apparent in Drona's death in that of Bhūriṣravas, also described as *yogayukta*, earlier in the *parvan* (7.118.16–18), while in the *Karmaparvan* the dying Drona is called *yuktayoga* (8.5.61).

parts of a chariot with the requirements of Yoga; this leads into a description of seven *dhāraṇās* (12.228.13–15, cf. also 12.289.39–57, which ends with the striking image that it is easier to stand on sharpened razor edges than to undertake the *dhāraṇās* of Yoga for the uncontrolled, 54). Again, within the *Śukānuprāśna*, Vyāsa's exposition of Sāṃkhya is followed by one of Yoga (12.232.2–22), which begins by describing the purpose of this complete *yogakṛtya* (2a) as 'unification of *buddhi* and *manas* and of the senses as a whole' (2cd) and defines its activities as 'meditation, study, giving, truth, modesty, honesty, patience, purity, cleanliness of food and restraint of the senses (10); it proclaims the goal as being the attainment of the state of Brahman (17) or identity with the imperishable (*gacched akṣarasātmyatām*, 20d) and concludes with an indication of the magical or supernatural powers achieved by its practices but to be disregarded by the true yogin (21–22), while in its terminology it is quite close to the *Yogaśūtra*. Near the end of the *Śukānuprāśna* Vyāsa then provides an account of the yogin's direct vision (12.245), quoting Śāṇḍilya's dictum that Yoga consists mainly of *samādhi* (245.13cd). The main passage concerned with the Yoga of heightened consciousness (*jñānadiptiyoga*) is the *Yogakathana* (12.289), which explicitly contrasts this form of Yoga with the lengthy account of Sāṃkhya presented in the following *adhyāya* (*Sāṃkhyakathana*, 12.290, containing 110 verses against 62 in the *Yogakathana*); this and other features suggest that it is relatively close to the classical Yoga of Patañjali. However, among its many analogies for powerful yogins is that 'a yogin who has become strong, mighty with flaming energy, like the sun at the time of the end of the world, might dry up the whole world' (12.289.21, cf. also 33).

Similarly, in the *Yājñavalkyajanakasamvāda*, Yājñavalkya follows an exposition of Sāṃkhya with one of Yoga (12.304, which has similarities with 12.232 mentioned above), in which he views Sāṃkhya in terms of knowledge and Yoga in terms of power (*nāsti sāṃkhyasamān jñānam nāsti yogasamān balam*, 2ab) while regarding them as one, affirms that the eightfold Yoga is found in the Vedas (*vedeṣu cāṣṭagunitam yogam āhur manūṣināḥ*, 7ab), and declares Yoga's two components to be breath control, which is *saguna*, and concentration of the mind, which is *nirguṇa* (8–9). Yājñavalkya also mentions twelve practices of concentration (*codana*) coupled with breath-control to be performed by an aspirant at the beginning and end of the night (11). Later in the passage there is the graphic picture of the man of concentration as one who could carry a full vessel of oil up a staircase while menaced by

men armed with swords without spilling a drop (22–23, cf. 289.32) and Yājñavalkya declares of the yogin who meditates on *śāṇa* and Brahman that ‘like a flame in a windless place, like a mountain peak, he beholds Brahman, which is like a fire in great darkness’ (19+25cd).

Nevertheless, the identity of Yoga with Sāṃkhya as far as its basic teachings are concerned is repeatedly stated, not only at 12.304.3, as just mentioned, but also, for example, at 295.42 and at 228.28, where their common acceptance of 25 *tattvas* is noted. The distinctiveness of Yoga lies in its techniques for *dhyāna* or meditation, as even more of the passages cited indicate. There is even at times a suggestion that the Sāṃkhya is preliminary to the Yoga, as in the metaphorical likening of Yoga to curds or whey (295.44cd). These two paths—they are not yet developed systems, even in the latest passages—are certainly prominent in the *Śāntiparvan*, mainly in the *Moksadharma-parvan*, but it contains much else besides, as earlier sections of this chapter have demonstrated. Zaehner has argued for a progression in the *Śāntiparvan*, declaring that ‘the scheme of the twelfth book of the Mahābhārata resembles that of the Bhagavad-Gītā in that its descriptions of liberation become increasingly theistic as the book moves towards its close.’¹⁶⁷ To the extent that he sees the *Nārāyaṇiya* as the climax of the book, such a view might be justified, but in reality the final passage is the *Uñchavyūpākhyāna*, referred to earlier in this chapter and basically devoted to extolling the merits of living on the grain gleaned after harvest. It is more plausible, in my view, to see the *Moksadharma-parvan*, and indeed the *Śāntiparvan* as a whole, as far from coherent, simply because it brings together so many divergent views. However, much work is still needed to disentangle the origins of the various strands of thought which we see here at a formative stage.

¹⁶⁷ Zaehner 1963b: 302. Elsewhere, Zaehner was less inclined to see it as a unity: ‘In the Epic rather more than half of the huge twelfth book is devoted to the subject of liberation, but much of it is inconsistent and confused because the subject always tends to get mixed up with cosmogony, so inextricably interconnected are the macrocosm and the microcosm in Hindu thought.’ (Zaehner 1963a: 220).

CHAPTER SIX

THE *HARIVAMŚA*

The *Harivamśa*—also named in the colophons of some manuscripts *Āścaryaparvan* (but only in *adhyāyas* 32–34, 37 and 113 which relate to Kṛṣṇa),¹ *Pārijāta* and *Māthura*—contains, along with a considerable amount of other material, a complete account of Kṛṣṇa’s life and death, but one which differs appreciably from that to be found in the *Mahābhārata*, of which it is traditionally a *khila* or supplement—and indeed its verse total in the vulgate version is added to that of the *Mahābhārata* itself by those who wish to justify exactly the description of that text as containing one hundred thousand verses, *śatasāhasrī samhitā*). In its opening verses the *Harivamśa* refers back to the *Mahābhārata* (*mahābhāratam ākhyānam* 1.8a) in a way that is clearly intended to place it in a direct line with it. There is also an interesting, though very late, self-reference in the episode of Nārada reading a copy of the *Harivamśa* to the Yādavas when he visits their assembly (1087*, read in the margin of one manuscript DS1).

Both André Couture and Freda Matchett have examined what it means to assert that the *Harivamśa* is a *khila* of the *Mahābhārata*.² As Couture notes, the translation of *khila* as ‘supplement’ or ‘appendix’ is often used to suggest that this material collected at the end of the *Mahābhārata* is optional or a late addition, which can safely be ignored (as Western scholarship has tended to do). To be precise, the late *Parvasamgrahaparvan* of the *Mahābhārata* refers not to one *khila* but to several and names the *Harivamśa* and the *Bhavisyat* (*khileṣu harivamśas ca bhavisyac ca prakīrtitam*, 1.2.233cd, cf. 1.2.69). The translation as ‘supplement’ does suggest more that the *khila* is something needed to complete the work to which it belongs and thus that it has an inherent relationship to it; as Matchett points out, the *Harivamśa* opens with Śaunaka telling the Sūta that there is something missing from

¹ I am indebted to Horst Brinkhaus for pointing this out to me and suggesting that the name may therefore denote the Kṛṣṇa portion, in contradistinction to the *Harivamśa* and *Bhavisya parvans*.

² Couture 1996 and Matchett 1996. I am grateful to Freda Matchett for drawing these to my attention.

his narrative so far, since he has spoken of the origin of the Kurus but not of the Vṛṣnis and Andhakas (1.5). However, as Friedhelm Hardy notes, at the same time as the *Harivamśa* proclaims its continuity with the *Mahābhārata*, it also recognises its discontinuity by its use of different terminology for the two works,³ while Matchett pertinently remarks that the very fact that it is regarded as a supplement is a sign of discontinuity, since for centuries new material had simply been incorporated into the main text of the *Mahābhārata*, while Kṛṣṇa's centrality in the *Harivamśa* also marks a discontinuity from the *Mahābhārata*, where he stands aside from the central action. In addition, the idea of a text as a 'supplement' leaves more open the question of the chronological relationship between the two works involved, on which more will be said later.

The traditional connection with the *Mahābhārata* is indeed real and significant, however we define it exactly, but it reveals nothing about the links with other texts, which implicitly it ignores. In particular, the *Kṛṣṇacarita* of the *Brahma Purāṇa* agrees not only over the number and order of Kṛṣṇa's exploits but sometimes even in its actual wording with the *Harivamśa*. However, the Kṛṣṇa story in the *Harivamśa* is about five times longer than that found in the *Brahma Purāṇa* and the general assumption has been that the *Harivamśa* has been greatly enlarged. On the other hand, the hearer or reader is referred to the Purāṇas for a fuller version of Baladeva's exploits at the end of the *Baladevamāhātmya* (*yad akathitam ihādyā karma te tad upalabhasva purāṇavistarāt*, 90.19cd). From these features springs the opposite tendency of viewing the *Harivamśa* as basically the first of the Purāṇas, on which point it is again relevant to cite the *Parvasamgrahaparvan* of the *Mahābhārata*: *hariwamśas tataḥ parva purāṇam khilasamjñitam* (1.2.69ab). Indeed, the *Harivamśa* is in some sense a *mahākāvya* (as it calls itself in its closing verses, 118.43a), a *purāṇa* and a *khila* simultaneously.

The contents of the *Harivamśa* are actually rather more extensive than its popular association with Kṛṣṇa suggests.⁴ It is traditionally divided into three *parvans*, the *Harivamśaparvan* (*adhyāyas* 1–45), *Viṣṇu-*

³ Hardy 1983: 67–70.

⁴ This sketch of its contents is based on the Critical Edition (and its *adhyāya* numbers are given in brackets), of which details will be provided below. It is also worth noting, in relation to any statistical data, that the text of the *Harivamśa* in the Critical Edition contains 6073 *śloka* units (an average per *adhyāya* of 51.47 verses—higher than the average for all except the *Karṇaparvan* of the *Mahābhārata*) and so is equivalent in length to the *Udyogaparvan* of the *Mahābhārata*.

parvan (46–113) and *Bhavisyaparvan* (114–118), but this seems relatively late. It opens in the manner common to the *Mahābhārata* and many Purāṇas with Janamejaya asking Vaiśampāyana to narrate the genealogy of the Vṛṣṇi race from the beginning and continues with material corresponding to the *purāṇapañcalakṣaṇa*; thus, *sarga* and *pratisarga* are covered in *adhyāyas* 1–2 (with creation proceeding from Viṣṇu) and the *manvantaras* are described in *adhyāya* 7 (while the remaining two topics are represented by various parts of the genealogical material, which include the story of King Pṛthu, 4–6). Other Purānic material in the first few chapters includes the *Pitṛkalpa* (11–19), within which the story of Brahmadatta and his seven sons is given at some length (14–19). Genealogies form a significant component: the Sūryavamśa (8–10), the Somavamśa leading to the Pauravas (20–23.121, resumed in *adhy.* 114) and the Yādavas (23.122–27). Other myths or legends narrated include the story of Triśaṅku (9), the myth of how Gaṅgā came to be known as Jāhnavī (23), the birth of Kālayavana (25), the story of the Syamantaka gem (28–29) and, in response to a long question by Janamejaya (30), the incarnations of Viṣṇu (31). Vaiśampāyana then takes up the narrative of the war between the Devas and Asuras, Viṣṇu's promise to help the gods against Kālanemi, and Earth's plea for help (32–43).

Following the rebirth of the Daitya Kālanemi as Kāṁsa (44), Viṣṇu agrees to take birth again as the son of Vasudeva (45) and Nārada warns Kāṁsa (46), who gives orders to guard Devakī and kill all children born to her (47). The birth of Kṛṣṇa and his secret exchange for Ekānaṁśā, the daughter of Nanda and Yaśodā, is then narrated (48), along with a description of the cowherds' camp (49); then follow Kṛṣṇa's and Saṁkarṣaṇa's childhood exploits (50–64, including the overturning of the cart and the killing of Pūtanā at 50, the uprooting of the two *arjuna* trees at 51, and the lifting of Mount Govardhana in defiance of Indra at 60–61), the journey to Kāṁsa's court accompanied by Akrūra (65–71), the failure of Kāṁsa's attempts to have Kṛṣṇa and Saṁkarṣaṇa killed and his own death (72–76), Ugrasena's installation as ruler of Mathurā (78), the attack on Mathurā by Jarāśaṁdha of Magadha and his defeat (80–82), Saṁkarṣaṇa dragging the Yamunā river with his ploughshare (83), the move from Mathurā to Dvārakā (84, with the entry into the new city at 93), Kālayavana's attack on Kṛṣṇa and his killing (85), Kṛṣṇa's abduction of and marriage with Rukmiṇī (87–88), the exploits of Balarāma (90) and the removal of the *pārijāta* tree from Indra's heaven

(92.63–67). Miscellaneous episodes, some relating to other members of his family, are then appended: the slaying of Śambara by Pradyumna (99), Kṛṣṇa as the wonder of wonders (100), Kṛṣṇa's recovering of the four dead sons of a brāhmaṇa (101–104) and Kṛṣṇa's fight with Bāṇa and the marriage of Bāṇa's daughter, Uṣā, with Aniruddha (105–113). The last five chapters form the *Bhavisyaparvan*, narrated by Ugraśravas; they contain the genealogy of Janamejaya and his performance of an *āśvamedha* (114) the characteristics of the Kaliyuga (115–117) and the reconciliation between Janamejaya and his queen, following Indra's intervention in the *āśvamedha* (118).

Thus, the major part of the *Viṣṇuparvan* deals with the deeds of Kṛṣṇa himself, along with Saṃkarṣaṇa (his usual name in the *Harivamṣa*), while the last fifteen chapters (and a much larger proportion of the vulgate text) deal also with those of his son and grandson, Pradyumna and Aniruddha. It is the main part, dealing as it does with Kṛṣṇa incarnate, which has particularly influenced later Indian literature. It provides the first connected account in Sanskrit of Kṛṣṇa's life among the cattle herders, of his slaying of Kaṁsa, of his wars against Jarāśaṅdha, and of his founding of Dvārakā. Kṛṣṇa and Saṃkarṣaṇa sport in the company of the cowherds and their cows in the *vṝja* (pasturage) on the wooded banks of the Yamunā. They go from forest to forest, ridding one spot after another of the demons in animal form with which they are regularly infested, but their favourite place is Vṛndāvana; it is there, in later accounts, that at certain times of the year, in particular during the full moon night of the month Kārttika (*kaumudī*), they indulge in games and dancing in the company of the cowgirls, the wives and daughters of the herdsmen. The *Harivamṣa*, however, includes only one passage of 21 verses (63.15–35) on the theme of Kṛṣṇa and the *gopīs*, and this rather lacks coherence, but even so it is notably more realistic, even earthy, than later accounts; however, the erotic element has been further developed in the Southern recension (736* and App. 12). The fifth book of the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* and the tenth book of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* are modelled on this central part of the *Harivamṣa*.⁵ In all the biographies of

⁵ Noel Sheth provides comparative analysis of the treatment of various incidents in Kṛṣṇa's life in the *Harivamṣa*, *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* and *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (1984 and some earlier articles). He suggests that a progressive deification of Kṛṣṇa takes place, with the *Harivamṣa* emphasising his heroic deeds, while the two Purāṇas stress the ease with which they are performed, and the disconcerting episodes found in the *Harivamṣa* are omitted, justified or transformed in them.

Kṛṣṇa, late as well as early, we are informed that the herders were ignorant of his divine nature but in the *Harivamśa* the whole narrative presupposes this, unlike later, more theological works such as the *Viṣṇu* and *Bhāgavata Purāṇas*.

Early scholarship and the Critical Edition

The first printed edition of the *Harivamśa* was published well before the middle of the 19th century as part of the Calcutta edition of the *Mahābhārata*, but it was preceded by a translation into French by Langlois (undertaken from manuscripts), and one into English followed before the end of the century.⁶ However, until recently there has been much less scholarly research undertaken on the *Harivamśa* than on the *Mahābhārata*, apart from its relevance to the development of the Kṛṣṇa cult; this chapter is therefore inevitably shorter and more uneven than those on the two major epics. The early Sanskritist Theodor Benfey and later in the 19th century E. Leumann both examined the story of Brahmadatta (13–19) as part of wider investigations into its indebtedness to the Buddhist *Cittasāmbhūta Jātaka* and the Jain *Uttarādhyayanaśūtra* 13.⁷ Hopkins makes occasional reference to the *Harivamśa* in his *Great Epic of India* and also later published a separate article on various points concerning it.⁸ While Willibald Kirsfel's seminal work on the *purāṇapañcalakṣana* included the *Harivamśa* among the texts studied,⁹ it was not until Walter Ruben's series of studies that it became the focus of more specific attention.¹⁰ Ruben started from the fact that the *Brahma Purāṇa* contains much the shortest account of Kṛṣṇa's life and that there are many instances of identical wording between the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* and the *Harivamśa*. He sought to reconstruct the archetype underlying these (and other) versions and argued that, once stripped of obvious interpolations, the account contained in the *Harivamśa* was actually shorter than that of the *Brahma Purāṇa* (thus rebutting the presumption that, as the longer version, the *Harivamśa* version was the later of the two), illustrating

⁶ *Harivamśa* 1839, 1834–35 and 1897. Subsequently an edition accompanied by Nilakantha's commentary, the *Bhāratabhāvadīpa*, was published (*Harivamśa* 1936).

⁷ Benfey 1864 and Leumann 1892: 1–11.

⁸ Hopkins 1901a and 1914.

⁹ Kirsfel 1926; also more generally, Kirsfel 1927.

¹⁰ Ruben 1939, 1941a and 1941b.

this with a presentation of his reconstruction of the *Kāliyadamana* episode.¹¹ Broadly, he argues that the archetype contained all the verses common to the *Brahma Purāṇa* and the *Harivamṣa* as far as these can be determined. Those passages of the *Harivamṣa* that Ruben accepts as old are retained in the text of the Critical Edition—these are *adhyāyas* 7 (with some App. I passages), 23–24, 59.1–18, 80–81, 84 and 86—but of those he queried some are retained and some excised,¹² as is also the case with those absent from the *Brahma Purāṇa*.¹³ Ruben also looks at the relationship of both the *Brahma Purāṇa* and the *Harivamṣa* with the account of Kṛṣṇa's death in the *Mausalaparvan*, pointing out that the *Mausalaparvan* narrative is much longer than that in the *Brahma Purāṇa*. He nevertheless sees the *Mausalaparvan* narrative as the source for the other two versions. His conclusions are that the core of the *Harivamṣa* was from the start conceived as a supplement to the *Mahābhārata*, forming part of its re-orienting towards Kṛṣṇa, and that the *Brahma Purāṇa* has derived its Kṛṣṇa story from the *Harivamṣa*, but not from the extant, much expanded *Harivamṣa* (expanded by later redactors to be more similar to the *Mahābhārata* in style and relative length) but from an older, shorter version.

Daniel Ingalls, in an assessment of the literary qualities of the *Harivamṣa*, declares that the Purāṇic elements, basically the *Harivamṣa-parvan* and the *Bhavisyaparvan*, are clearly inessential and merely form a framework to an extensive epic poem on the deeds of Kṛṣṇa and his descendants.¹⁴ Indeed, he goes so far as to assert that undoubtedly the name *Harivamṣa* originally belonged to this epic on Kṛṣṇa, despite its use for the first sub-*parvan*, where the genealogical lists starting from Viṣṇu make the name more appropriate, since *hari* is primarily a name for Viṣṇu (occurring only sporadically in the *Viṣṇuparvan* and even so to denote Viṣṇu rather than Kṛṣṇa). Ingalls's article was published in the year before the first volume of the Critical Edition

¹¹ Ruben 1939: 191–203. Ruben's reconstruction does not gain any support from the Critical Edition of the *Harivamṣa*. For more recent concordances of the *Brahma Purāṇa* with the *Harivamṣa*, see *Brahmapurāṇa* 1987: 808–11 (Appendix 2, concordance of Br.P. 1–17 with Hv. 1–25) and 821 (Appendix 9, concordance of Br.P. 213 with Hv. 30–31).

¹² These are *adhyāyas* 45–46, App. I.20, App. I.29A, App. I.29C, 93–98 (regarded as a repetition of *adhy.* 86), App. I.29 (repeat of *adhy.* 92) and most of App. I.20.

¹³ These are *adhyāyas* 32–41, 52 (part), 54, 66.1–38, 68 (part), App. I.14, 73.10–18, App. I.15, 73.18–38, 85 (part), App. I.29B, App. I.29D, part of App. I.30, App. I.24, 100–104, 105, 113, 115, 118, App. I.41, App. I.42A, App. I.42B, App. I.31, App. I.40, App. I.43, App. I.44 and App. I.45.

¹⁴ Ingalls 1968.

of the *Harivamśa*, which was to render outdated all earlier studies of its character, dating and significance.

Work on the Critical Edition of the *Harivamśa* had in fact started in 1954 under P. L. Vaidya, who was by then the General Editor, as the final part of the text of the Critical Edition of the *Mahābhārata*, but it was another fifteen years before it was published.¹⁵ The text is radically shorter than that of the vulgate, at around a third of its length (118 *adhyāyas* containing 6073 *śloka* units against 318 *adhyāyas* and around 18,000 *ślokas*) but even so Vaidya suggests that this represented an expanded text and proposed that the oldest form of the *Harivamśa* probably began with *adhyāya* 20 (which is where *Agni Purāṇa* 12 places its start) and must have ended with *adhyāya* 98 of his text, as well as suggesting that 73.9–37, Kāṁsa's justification of his hostility towards his parents and the other Yādavas, does not belong to the oldest form of the text.¹⁶ Vaidya also modified the practice of the *Mahābhārata* Critical Edition by including sporadically the evidence of four printed editions, alongside that of 36 manuscripts; in constituting the text he relied mainly on five manuscripts (Ś1 as the best representative of the NW recension, Ā1 of the NE recension, and M1–3 of the S recension), which furnish a text of which the extent is basically supported by the testimony of Kṣemendra's *Bhāratamājjarī* in the middle of the 11th century. Although Vaidya asserts that the manuscripts of the *Harivamśa* do not support the division into three sub-*parvans*, there are some old manuscripts that do contain *parvan* names, but not the three of the vulgate tradition, only *Harivamśa* and *Bhavisya*.¹⁷ On the question of the relationship between the *Harivamśa* and the *Purāṇas*, where he appears uninfluenced by and indeed ignorant of the research of Kirfel and Ruben, Vaidya notes that there is clear evidence that the scribes of some manuscripts deliberately incorporated material from the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*.¹⁸

¹⁵ *Harivamśa* 1969–71.

¹⁶ *Harivamśa* 1969–71: 785, XXX and 795. Similarly, Couture says that the chapters translated seem to belong to the essential and most original part of the work: 'il me semble qu'il s'agit de la partie essentielle et la plus originale de ce livre' (1991: 65).

¹⁷ *Harivamśa* 1969–71: IX, and information from an unpublished paper by Horst Brinkhaus presented at the preliminary meeting for the Dubrovnik International Conference on the Sanskrit Epics and *Purāṇas*, August, 1994.

¹⁸ *Harivamśa* 1969–71: XXV: 'I, therefore, feel compelled to draw the conclusion that copyists of K3, K4 and D2 were themselves Pandits well-versed in the Bhāgavata *Purāṇa*, and thought that the *Harivamśa* might have in its narration of the life of Lord Kṛṣṇa a lacuna and it was their duty to fill it up.' This is supported by

The relegation to Appendix I of around two thirds of the vulgate (including almost all the third *parvan*) is indeed a drastic proceeding and Vaidya implicitly acknowledged this by providing separately a listing of the manuscripts in which each passage is found and the reasons for its non-inclusion in the constituted text; he also suggests that App. I.29 was composed after 1050 but before 1200 A.D. and affirms: 'All the remaining passages of both recensions came into the Vulgate after about A.D. 1200'.¹⁹ Several passages are excluded because they are omitted only by the sole Śāradā manuscript utilised, Š1 (Nos. 18, 40, 42 and 42A–B—18 is also not supported by Kṣemendra's *Bhāratamāñjarī*), and one because it is omitted by the Newārī script manuscript Ņ1 only (No. 43). There is an argument that the passages on the three *prādurbhāvas* Varāha, Narasiṁha and Vāmana (Nos. 42 and 42A–B), which are supported by the *Bhāratamāñjarī*, should find a place in the text, since their appearance already along with other *prādurbhāvas* in the text at *adhyāya* 31 is not a strong reason for dropping them here. In addition, Brinkhaus has noted that in Ņ1 App. 29, the Pradyumnotara chapter, does not follow *adhyāya* 92, as in all other manuscripts, but App. 42, thus forming the end of the complete work.²⁰ What is particularly significant is the dating that he has established, since one manuscript examined by him, which appears to be Ņ1 and is in fact dated NS 157 = 1036–37 A.D.,²¹ shows this positioning, whereas a Devanāgarī manuscript of 1144–45 A.D. shows this passage already located in the middle of the *Harivamśa* text, where it has since remained; thus this passage, already accepted by Vaidya as probably earlier than others, must be somewhat earlier still. Indeed, Brinkhaus suggests that this version of the Pradyumna-Prabhāvatī story, which differs significantly from the one generally current in Nepal, may nevertheless also have originated in Nepal and spread from there throughout India in the *Harivamśa*.

As with the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the publication of the

identification in the Critical Apparatus of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* source of various
* passages.

¹⁹ *Harivamśa* 1969–71: XXX–XXXI.

²⁰ Brinkhaus 1987: 89–95 'The Indian Version of the Pradyumna-Prabhāvatī Legend in the *Harivamśa*'.

²¹ Vaidya had written: 'Although Ņ1 has no date recorded, I think its orthography is very much similar to that of the Rāmāyaṇa Ms. used in the Baroda edition which Ms. is dated A.D. 1020' (*Harivamśa* 1969–71: XVIII), but he regarded it as slightly later than Kṣemendra and so assigned it to the close of the 11th or the first half of the 12th century.

Critical Edition prompted translation of the text, although so far only partial translations have appeared, both concerned with the childhood of Kṛṣṇa, from his birth to his defeat of Kaṁsa. In fact, in Couture's French version the portion translated begins with the listing of the various *avatāras* of Viṣṇu in *adhyāyas* 30–31.²² The translation is laid out with usually a separate paragraph to each verse, in the manner of the Princeton translation of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, rather than the better precedent established by van Buitenen's *Mahābhārata* translation; like those, it is based on the Critical Edition but Couture emphasises that he has adopted an intermediate approach between their translating just that edition and Biardeau's translating just the vulgate, since he has included in his translation a selection of the * passages (in some instances simply noting the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* passage incorporated) and all the Appendix I passages within that section.²³ There is also a free English translation, often more of a paraphrase, of *adhyāyas* 46–78 by Francis Hutchins, of which the main feature is the inclusion of many illustrations of miniatures in public and private collections in India, Britain and the United States of America.²⁴

Language and style

Stylistically, the most prominent features of the *Harivamśa*, at any rate in the *Viṣṇuparvan*, are the vividness of its descriptions and its simplicity of style, which relies almost entirely on *svabhāvokti* and simple simile and metaphor. Ingalls also notes the frequent use of parataxis to produce the figure called *citra* and points to a number of striking instances of *kāvya*-like description (all but one of which are retained in the text of the Critical Edition).²⁵ Ingalls further suggests that the

²² Couture 1991. The translation itself is preceded by an extensive introduction in which Couture outlines the narrative, examines some of its main themes, sketches the history of scholarship on the subject and concludes with a review of current research. The volume includes an excellent glossary and mythological index combined which is a really useful tool.

²³ Though frequently noting parallels with the *Rāmāyaṇa* as well as other texts, Couture omits the most obvious one of Hv. 31.128–42 with Rām. 6.116.80–90.

²⁴ Hutchins 1980.

²⁵ Ingalls 1968: 390–1. The descriptions that he notes (and their location in the Critical Edition) are: the nomads' camp (*adhy.* 49), the grazing grounds (52), breaking camp (53), the rains (54), autumn (59.19–61), mount Govardhana (61), a second

nearest equivalent in style to this part of the *Harivamśa* is the *Rāmāyaṇa* but that ‘if anything, one would say that the *Harivamśa*’s style with its parataxis, its lack of sophistication, its occasional brutality of language, is somewhat more archaic than the *Rāmāyaṇa*.²⁶ Regrettably, little has yet been done to analyse the linguistic features of the *Harivamśa*, which is usually assumed to share the same features as the two major epics; while this is no doubt true in general terms, there are likely to be variations of detail in usage, as well as shifts in vocabulary which could hold clues to our understanding of the text. The little that has been done by older scholars has been vitiated by the inadequacy of the text worked on. For example, Hopkins remarked on the reading *dhanvābhīr* that he found at line 7316 of the Calcutta edition and the reading *dhanvibhīḥ* which he inferred as underlying Langlois’s translation that ‘metrically either form, if not unheard of, is so uncouth and unusual that *dhanvibhīḥ* from this point of view is as bad as *dhanvabhiḥ*, which is of course the only grammatical possibility.’²⁷ The line in question is in fact relegated to App. I.29.675 and the critical apparatus makes clear that *dhanvibhīḥ*—the reading adopted—has the support of the majority of manuscripts (the only significant variant being *dhanurbhiḥ*); similarly, there is no manuscript support for the reading of the Calcutta edition a few lines later of *yavīyāsam*.²⁸ The frequency of double sandhi in the text is effectively the same as the average for the *Mahābhārata* as a whole, on the evidence of the list of occurrences collected by Veena Bhatnagar.²⁹

Formulaic expression is equally a feature of the style of the *Harivamśa* as it is for the *Mahābhārata*, although the number of different formulæ and the totals of their occurrences are naturally lower because of the much smaller extent of the *Harivamśa* (equivalent to one of the medium-sized books of the *Mahābhārata*).³⁰ While the frequency of stereotyped

description of autumn (62) a king’s council (65), nightfall (68), sunrise (70), and a forest (73.11–16 with App. 15).

²⁶ Ingalls 1968: 393.

²⁷ Hopkins 1914: 69.

²⁸ Hopkins also notes in the same article (1914: 71) two readings in Calcutta edn. 8803 (= CE App. I.29F.545–8), one of which, *goṣṭhāḥ* is retained (with *goṣṭhe* as a variant in some manuscripts), although an accusative or locative is required, while the other, *parīvāyamāṇah*, is revealed as a wrong reading of the variant *parīvāyamāṇah* for the reading adopted *parīcaryamāṇah*.

²⁹ Bhatnagar 1973.

³⁰ A minimum of three occurrences has been taken as the lower limit. Occurrences of these stereotyped *pādas* may readily be located from *The Pratīka-Index* (*Mahābhārata* 1967–72, vol. 6). However, unlike the rest of this index, the second

pādas relating to Kṛṣṇa is to be expected, the most frequent of such *pādas* incorporating names in fact refers to Kṛṣṇa and Saṃkarṣaṇa together (*vasudevasutāv ubhau* found 7 times, also *kṛṣṇasamkarṣaṇāv ubhau* 4 times), and one of the commoner ones relates to Saṃkarṣaṇa by himself (*sa ca/tu samkarsano yuvā*, occurring 6 times); this attests very clearly the greater prominence of Saṃkarṣaṇa in the *Harivamśa* than in the *Mahābhārata*. Also, there are some differences in distribution of those relating to Kṛṣṇa compared with the *Mahābhārata*; *kṛṣṇam akliṣṭakarmāṇam*, which occurs only once in the *Mahābhārata*, is found 3 times (and once in the genitive), whereas *kṛṣṇam akliṣṭakāriṇam*, the usual form in the *Mahābhārata*, occurs only once (at 66.35d). Other *pādas* incorporating names of Kṛṣṇa are *kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa mahābāho* (6 times, four of which are in *adhy.* 110–111, also for example at App. I.20.1154 pr.), *keśavasya mahātmanah* (5 times), *kṛṣṇam kamalocanam* (4 times), *vāsudevasya dhīmataḥ* (4 times) and *vāsudevaḥ pratāpavān* (4 times, in *adhy.* 109 and 112 only). Other *pādas* incorporating a proper name are *kardamasya prajāpateḥ* (3 times), *jarāsamdhō mahābalah* (4 times),³¹ *tāv ubhau madhukaitabhu* (3 times), *pr̥thvī vainyāḥ pratāpavān* (3 times), *bāñnam apratimam rāṇe* (3 times), *brahmā lokapitāmahāḥ* (5 times), *maindo dvividā eva ca* (3 times), *viṣṇuh satyaparākramāḥ* (3 times), *vr̥ṣṇyandhakamahārathāḥ* (5 times), *satyabhāmottamā strīnām* (3 times) and *sa rājā janamejayāḥ* (3 times). The genealogies also generate certain standardised phrasing: *tāsv apatyāni me śr̥nu, teṣāṁ putrāś ca paustrāś ca* and *rājā paramadhārmikāḥ* each occur three times and *trayah paramadhārmikāḥ* four times; also similar is *śatam uttamadhanvinām* (9.49b, 23.61b and 114.3b). Some other phrases are specific to the *Harivamśa* as a result of subject-matter: *jagrāha puruṣottamāḥ* and *jaghāna puruṣottamāḥ* (both 3 times), *dāmodara-parāyanāḥ* (3 times), *maniratnam syamantakam* (4 times in 28–29), *manor antaram ucyate* (3 times), *varadatto mahāsurāḥ* (3 times), *samāśritya jarāsam-dham* (3 times) and *hiranyakaśīpur hataḥ* (30.13d, 31.31d, 38.10d, also e.g. App. I.42A.2 post.).

Introductions and conclusions to speeches show many of the same stereotyped expressions as the *Mahābhārata* but two that are much

half of volume 6 indexes only the text of the *Harivamśa*. As in the discussion of such expressions in the *Mahābhārata*, the most typical form is cited and variations of case or number are ignored, unless significant.

³¹ This *pāda* is rare in the *Mahābhārata* (occurring at 1.1828* 5 post., 2.39.1b and 158* 2 post. only) and another, *jarāsamdhāḥ pratāpavān*, is slightly more frequent, at least in * passages (2.212* 1 post., App. 6.72 post., App. 8.5 post. App. 10.3 post. and 7.156.16b).

commoner in the *Harivamśa* are *ity evam ukte vacane* (9 times in *adhy.* 107–111 only, also Mbh. 3.11.35a and 14.95.16a) and *vaiśampāyana kīrtaya* (at 3.1d, 4.19b, 21b, 7.1d, also Mbh. 1.109.4d, 3.236.4d and 5.2* 2 post.);³² others are *idam vacanam abravīt* (7 times), *kīrtayisyāmi tac chṛṇu* (3 times), *tan nibodha narādhipa* (3 times), *nāradasya vacah śrutvā* (3 times), *yathā te kathitam pūrvam* (3 times), *yan mām tvam pariprcchasi* (3 times), *vacanam cedam abravīt* (3 times), *vistareṇa tapodhana* (5 times, with a verb of speaking elsewhere in the verse), *śrotum icchāmi tattvataḥ* (7 times) and *sa mām uvāca dharmātmā* (3 times). Of the two verbal formulæ expressing emphasis, *bhavisyati na samśayah* (3 times) is not uncommon in the *Mahābhārata* and *vaktum varṣasatair api* (3 times) does occur there (Mbh. 1.92.13d and 12.321.5d), but *dhanyo ’smi anugṛhīto ’smi* (6 times, against 3 times in the text of the *Mahābhārata*) and *svasti te ’stu vrajāmy aham* (3 times, against once in the *Mahābhārata* text and *svasti te ’stu gamisyāmi* 6 times there) are much more frequent in the *Harivamśa*; other general descriptive phrases are *ratnāni vividhāni ca* (3 times) and *lokānām hitakāmyayā* (4 times, common in later parts of the *Mahābhārata*). Stock expressions connected with battle are somewhat less common than in the *Mahābhārata* but mostly show a similar range: *ksepanīyaiś ca mudgaraiḥ* (3 times, not found in the *Mahābhārata*), *tataḥ kilakilāśabdah* (4 times), *tad yuddham abhavad ghoram* (7 times), *papāta dharanītale* (5 times) and *śonitaughaplutair gātraiḥ* (3 times). Phrases of time comprise *acireṇiwa kālena* (3 times), *etasminn antare x x* (13 times), *etasminn eva kāle tu* (6 times), *kasya cit tv atha kālasya* (6 times), *tataḥ prabhāte vimale* (3 times) and *daśavarṣasahasrāṇi* (4 times), but the only other stereotyped phrase of number found is *śataśo ’tha sahasraśah* (5 times). Stereotyped long compounds which occupy a full *pāda* are *gandharvoragaraksasām* (4 times, cf. *gandharvaiḥ sāpsaroganaiḥ* 3 times), *niḥsvādhyāyavaṣṭkārāḥ* (3 times), *nīlāñjanacayopamam* (3 times), *vṛṣṇivamśa-prasangena* (3 times), *śakratulyaparākramah* (3 times), *śankhacakragadādharaḥ* (4 times), *śankhacakragadāsibhṛt* (5 times) and *sarvayādavanandanah* (3 times).³³ However, no stereotyped similes occur apart from those listed among the long compounds (*nīlāñjanacayopamam* and *śakratulyaparākramah*), and the only example of a *pāda* formed from two *yathā-* compounds—*yathāsthānam yathāvayah* occurring five times—does not occur in the

³² With the second of these may be compared the long compounds *vaiśampāyana-kīrtitam* at Mbh. 12.860* 1 post and 18.5.30b and *vaiśampāyanabhāṣitam* at Hv. 113.83b.

³³ It is perhaps worth noting that another long compound, *siddhacāraṇasamgha*, found in the *Mahābhārata* mainly in the *Śānti* and *Anuśāsana parvans*, does occur once in the *Harivamśa* (109.91a), in view of the link with *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* 10.33.4–5.

Mahābhārata (the nearest equivalent is *yathāsthānam yathāvidhi* at Mbh. 13.130.39b). Formulae with some degree of religious reference or significance form a larger group comparatively than in the *Mahābhārata* or *Rāmāyaṇa* and comprise (in addition to those contained in long compounds) *ādityā vasava rudrāḥ* (4 times), *cacāra viḍulam tapah* (3 times), *tatraivāntaradhiyata* (5 times), *devānām dānavānām ca* (4 times) and *surānām asurānām ca* (3 times), *nāvarṣat pākaśāsanah* (4 times), *yajvā viḍuladakṣiṇah* (5 times), *vidhidrṣṭena karmanā* (3 times), *vihitam viśvakarmanā* (3 times), *vainateyam samāruhya* (3 times), *samgrāme tārakāmaye* (5 times) and *sahasrasīrasam devam* (3 times).

The distribution of repeated *pādas* is also significant. In *adhyāya* 4 is found *rājānam so 'bhyasēcayat* (11d, 12d, 13d, 14d), in *adhyāya* 6 there occur both *punar dagdhā vasum̄dhārā* (16b, 20b, 25b, 28b, 30b) and *pr̄thur eva namaskāryah* (43c, 47c, 48c), in *adhyāya* 13 is found *teṣām vai mānasī kanyā* (52a, 60a, 63a), in *adhyāya* 23 there occurs *yatra jāto 'si pārthiva* (2f, 42d, 115b, 122b), *adhyāya* 31 contains *prādurbhāvo mahātmanah* (21b, 92b, 93b, 100d, 109d, 143b) and *rāme rājyam praśāsati* (129d, 130d, 134d, 135d, also 478* 2 post. and elsewhere at App. I.18.216 post., borrowed from the *Rāmāyaṇa*), while in the last four *adhyāyas* there occur *yugānte janamejaya* (115.45d, 116.7d, 8d, 33d) and *yugānte pratyupasthite* (116.31d, 32d, 117.15d), *bhavisyanti yugaksaye* (116.6d, 9d, 10d, 12d, 13d, 30d, 117.25d), *tat kaṣāyasyalakṣaṇam* (117.11d, 12d, 14d) and *tryajñāsatayājinah* (118.29b, 29f, 32f, and *tryajñāsatayavānam* at 24a). Thus, there are none in the *Viṣṇuparvan* and the greatest concentration is in the *Bhavisyaparvan*, occurring in all but its first *adhyāya*. Occasional instances of the repetition of complete *ślokas* are found, for example 4.15 and 22.18a-d (*tair iyam pr̄thivī sarvā saptadvīpā sapattanā | yathāpradeśam adyāpi dharmena pariḍalyate*), with 23.144ab also almost identical to the first line.

The authors of the *Harivamśa* are much less concerned, at least in its earlier phases, to establish its connections with the Vedic literature. Despite this, Couture argues that there is a close relationship between the Kṛṣṇa narrative and the presentation of Viṣṇu in the *R̄gveda* and suggests that the *Harivamśa* was the work of brāhmaṇas who were steeped in a Vedic atmosphere.³⁴ However, it is noteworthy that allusions, whether explicit or not, are mainly if not entirely limited to passages excluded from the text for lack of manuscript support. The seven sages are described as the creators of the *mantras*

³⁴ Couture 1991: 69.

and Brāhmaṇas (*mantrabṛāhmaṇakartārah*, 133* 15 pr.). The echo of the Brāhmaṇa myth of Makha's head which Hopkins detected in the story of Indra giving Viṣṇu a new head is relegated to App. I.29.674–685, while the comparison of a frog with a priest, which he considered to be based on *Rgveda* 7.103, occurs at App. I.29F.545–8.³⁵ Again, *Rgveda* 10.95.1ab is closely copied in App. I.6.48–49 (*jāye ha tiṣṭha manasi ghore vacasi tiṣṭha he | evamādīni sūktāni parasparam abhāṣatām*).

Conversely, there are traces of the links both with the *Mahābhārata* and with the Purāṇas within the text. Some of these have already been indicated in the opening paragraphs of this chapter but further examples can be added, such as the mention of *sūtamāgadhau* at 2.23d (cf. *sūtamāgadhabandin* App. I.20.323 pr., 1042 pr.) and the reference to knowers of the Purāṇas chanting (*purāṇajñāna gāyanti*, 27.17ab; cf. the reference to *mahaṛśis* as knowing the Purāṇas at App. I.41.344).

Growth and development

The *Harivamśa* is usually assigned to the 3rd or 4th century A.D. but this dating is based on an unspoken and over simple assumption that the text is homogeneous and can be assigned to a particular period by stray references contained within it. In reality, the structure of the text is more complex and the issues of its own process of growth and of its relationship to other texts are more significant than attempts to locate it neatly at a particular point in time. Indeed, the spread in time of the external evidence for its date goes rather to reinforce the probability of its growth over a considerable period. Whereas the usual dating adopted by Western scholars indicates that the *Harivamśa* is later than the *Mahābhārata*, there is also the point noted in the previous chapter that there are various allusions to episodes in the life of Kṛṣṇa in the *Mahābhārata* which are not explained within that text. This is, however, susceptible of two interpretations: either that the authors of the *Mahābhārata* were deliberately not repeating material that could be found in the *Harivamśa*—which is basically the position adopted by Biardeau,³⁶ though not particularly plausible in view of the tendency to include so much else within the *Mahābhārata*—or else that these allusions were the starting point for the elaboration

³⁵ Hopkins 1914: 68–71.

³⁶ Biardeau 1968–78: V, 204–237.

of the *Harivamśa*, also not entirely adequate in view of the number of such allusions, which suggests that traditions about Kṛṣṇa were already current in some form. Certainly, there is a complementarity of a kind in the references to Kṛṣṇa in the *Mahābhārata* and the *Harivamśa* but, as S. N. Tadpatrikar observed in relation to the *Mahābhārata* and the *Purāṇas* (with which he classified the *Harivamśa*), in broad terms, with the exception of the *mausala* episode and the destruction of the Yādavas, no incident is common and the two are quite separate traditions.³⁷ The second explanation is thus probably nearer the truth—and Hardy indeed suggests that ‘by the fourth century A.D. the major tradition about Kṛṣṇa, viz. the *Mahābhārata* (which after all contains the *Bhagavadgītā*) had been complemented by material about Kṛṣṇa from another tradition’³⁸—but there is a definite possibility that elements now included in the *Harivamśa* were taking shape concurrently with the main period of growth of the *Mahābhārata* rather than just with its latest parts.

Biardeau has emphasised what she sees as the close relationship between the *Mahābhārata* and the *Harivamśa*, claiming that the *Mahābhārata* already makes specific references to the childhood of Kṛṣṇa and uses the names Dāmodara, Keśava and Govinda which refer to this period of his life, while the *Harivamśa* is well aware of the *Mahābhārata* and in particular of the close relationship between Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna (the prediction in *adhyāya* 62 of that relationship).³⁹ Dāmodara Kṛṣṇa and Saṃkarṣaṇa, roaming the woods of Vraja, are represented as young boys, who are adolescents rather than mere children. In the episodes relating to Kṛṣṇa’s infancy at Gokula, Saṃkarṣaṇa plays little part, at least until a later date.

Ingalls gave three indications that he had gleaned from the Calcutta edition of its posteriority to the *Rāmāyaṇa*: mention of Vālmīki as a poet equal to Vyāsa (which is however relegated to App. I.8.29), reference to Rāma as an incarnation of Viṣṇu (this is retained at 65.43 but need suggest no more than contemporaneity with the *Bāla* and *Uttara kāṇḍas*) and the foreign loan-word *dīnārikā*, Latin *denarius* (relegated to App. I.20.1014).⁴⁰ These points are only valid for the

³⁷ Tadpatrikar 1929: 324.

³⁸ Hardy 1983: 70.

³⁹ Biardeau 1968–78: V, 208–220.

⁴⁰ Ingalls 1968: 393–94, where he also suggests that ‘the general consensus’ is that ‘the *Harivamśa* dates from between the birth of Christ and the third century A.D.’ The point about the denarius goes back to R. G. Bhandarkar (1913: 51).

passages in which they occur and the last point is not, of course, directly relevant to the relationship of the *Harivamṣa* with any other text. In any case, as Mazumdar noted, the mention of the denarius does not fix the date at all exactly, since the denarius is referred to elsewhere as late as the 6th century A.D.⁴¹ More relevant to the relationship of the *Harivamṣa* to the *Rāmāyaṇa* is the fact that it knows in detail the story of Mathurā being founded by Śatruघna after he has killed the Dānava Lavana, son of Madhu, found only in the *Uttarakānda* (Rām. 7.52–63), which is narrated at 44.20–53 (with similarities of wording between 44.22a, 23ab, 33ab, 50b and Rām. 7.53.3d, 17ab, 60.14 and 56.16d respectively, cf. App. I.18.216–9, where the occurrence of *rāme rājyam prasāsati* at 216 post. indicates direct dependence on the *Rāmāyaṇa*). But the clearest evidence comes from the *prādurbhāva* passage at *adhyāya* 31, which draws directly on the actual wording of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, while itself being the source of the version taken into the *Sabhāparvan* (App. 21), as will be shown in detail in the first section of chapter ten.

However, there are some indications that features of the description of the *avatāras* may reflect Kuṣāṇa iconography, for instance in Narasiṁha first having a lion form and then dividing himself in two (Hv. 30.13), which N. P. Joshi has compared to a Kuṣāṇa-period plaque from Konḍāmotu, and in the prominence of Balarāma as well as details of his appearance, seen in the frequent Kuṣāṇa images of him.⁴² Just as in some parts of the *Mahābhārata*, various war-like peoples of foreign origin are mentioned: Yavanas (10.38a, 42c, 44a, 25.12c, 85.12b, 13c, 17d, 18b, 48a), Śakas (10.38a, 42a, 44a, 85.19a), Tuṣāras (85.19a), Pahlavas (10.38c, 43b, 85.19c) and Mlecchas (85.10d, 46b, 117.30d). All of these suggest a dating of the 1st or 2nd century for the relevant parts of the text.

V. V. Mirashi has proposed that, in Ānandavardhana's reference to the *Harivijaya* of Sarvasena as embellishing a simple narration, the original intended is the brief description of the seizure of the *pārijāta* tree at *Harivamṣa* 92.63–67 (and not the lengthy narrative at App. I.29, for obvious reasons, although he also mentions the allusion at Mbh. 7.10.22–23, without explaining why that is not intended); he

There is in fact a reference to acting plays on the *Rāmāyaṇa* at App. I.29F.236–248 (read by the majority of manuscripts).

⁴¹ Mazumdar 1907b.

⁴² Joshi 1973.

therefore baldly asserts that the *Harivamśa* in the form given in the Critical Edition ‘must have been composed before A.D. 200 at least’, since he identifies Sarvasena with the Vākāṭaka prince of that name (fl. 330–355 A.D.).⁴³ More soundly, Sivaprasad Bhattacharyya points to evidence that Kālidāsa was familiar with the *Harivamśa* and thus that it was well known by the end of the 4th century.⁴⁴

More helpful are the studies of individual passages in relation to other texts or to the *Harivamśa* as a whole. At the broadest level in this respect, Matchett suggests that the purāṇic material on cosmology and genealogies ‘is a prelude which looks forward continually to the family of Vṛṣni into which Krishna is to be born’ and that therefore ‘the earliest text to be known as the *Harivamśa* may be seen in Hv. 1–98’, while recognising that there seem to be too many inconsistencies in the material for it to have formed a unity from the start.⁴⁵ In particular, she points to the incongruity of the story of the Syamantaka jewel (an episode from Kṛṣṇa’s adult life) being narrated in *adhyāyas* 28–29 before the story of his birth in *adhyāya* 46, while suggesting a possible resolution for the problem by treating it as a transition from the purely human Kṛṣṇa as part of the Yādava dynasty to his revelation as Viṣṇu’s manifestation but also noting that text-historical analysis might well show that it consists of two originally separate stories (*adhyāya* 28, with its own *phalaśruti* at 28.45, and *adhyāya* 29). She also rightly points out that the transition from the *Harivamśaparvan* to the *Visnuparvan* is by no means as clear cut as one might expect (as is illustrated by the fact that the paragraph break in the summary given above does not coincide with it) and that the figures of Nārada and Nidrā span it.

After a careful analysis of the *manvantara* passages in the *Vāmana Purāṇa*, the *Brahmānda Purāṇa* and the *Harivamśa*, Gail concludes that their original source was contained in a lost version of the *Vāmana Purāṇa*, from which are derived the versions in the extant *Vāmana Purāṇa* and the *Harivamśa* (as found in the Critical Edition), while the *Brahmānda Purāṇa* borrowed from the *Harivamśa*, which also in its vulgate form contains additions from the extant *Vāmana Purāṇa*.⁴⁶ A recent study of the *Pitṛkalpa* (Hv. 11–19) has assigned it without further discussion to the 2nd or 3rd century, while recognising it as an

⁴³ Mirashi 1971.

⁴⁴ Bhattacharyya 1958.

⁴⁵ Matchett 1996: 144.

⁴⁶ Gail 1974.

insertion between the solar and lunar genealogies.⁴⁷ On the nature of this passage, Saindon emphasises that it should be recognised as an account of the origin and role of the *pitr̄s* (and not as a *śrāddhakalpa* or ritual handbook on their cult, to which only App. I.4 corresponds, cf. Mbh. 13.87–92), since the main focus of attention is the *pitr̄s* themselves: who they are and where they reside, whether they are deities, whether they merely receive the offerings of their descendants or whether they help the living. The text in fact goes on to propound a relationship of mutual assistance between the living and the dead, the sons and their fathers (*pitr̄s*), while also distinguishing between the ordinary *pitr̄s* and ‘the other *pitr̄s*’ (*pitaro ’nye* 11.2, 13, 32) who are the sons of Brahmā (11.36) and thus stand in an inverse relationship, which is used to illuminate the reciprocal obligations and benefits involved in the *śrāddha* ritual. In its reworking of the older ideas of the *pitryāna* and the *devayāna* the passage is of considerable significance for the development of classical Hinduism. Hardy has subjected the passage on Kṛṣṇa sporting with the *gopīs* (63.15–35) to critical examination and noted that the eroticism of the passage has been significantly increased by variants and additions in the Southern recension alone; he also calls the passage ‘strange and puzzling’, noting that ‘there is no recognizable story, no logical development, no coherence in the narrative, and all this distinguishes the passage from other chapters’.⁴⁸ Vaidya has drawn attention to the growth over time of the episode of the battle with Bāna and the marriage of Aniruddha and Uṣā (105–113), most of which he has removed from the text.⁴⁹

Recently Brinkhaus has rebutted the prevailing view, enunciated for example not only by Ruben but also by Vaidya, that the story of Kṛṣṇa forms the core of the *Harivamśa*, while the first part of the *Harivamśaparvan* and the whole of the *Bhavisyaparvan* are later additions.⁵⁰ He notes that Ruben held that for these passages the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* was based on the *Brahma Purāṇa*, whereas the reverse is the case, as Peter Schreiner has recently demonstrated,⁵¹ and that Ruben therefore misconstrued the relationships between all three texts.

⁴⁷ Marcelle Saindon (1995). There is also an older study by J. D. L. de Vries (1928).

⁴⁸ Hardy 1983: 70–78, quoting 73–74.

⁴⁹ *Harivamśa* 1969–71: 798.

⁵⁰ Brinkhaus 1990.

⁵¹ Schreiner 1988a and 1989.

Brinkhaus demonstrates that in fact at various points the parallels between the *Brahma Purāṇa* and the *Hariwamśa* and those between the *Brahma* and *Viṣṇu Purāṇas* do not overlap but follow each other smoothly and closely and argues that the simplest explanation for this is that in these passages the *Brahma Purāṇa* has been patched together from portions taken from older works, the *Hariwamśa* and the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*; Utz Podzeit has come to a similar conclusion about the sequential relationship of the *Hariwamśa*, the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* and the *Brahma Purāṇa* in their narration of the episode of Balarāma killing Pralamba.⁵² Thus, Brinkhaus argues that the oldest part of the *Hariwamśa* is the first and third *parvans* as a supplement to the *Mahābhārata*, to which the Kṛṣṇa story was added. The extreme brevity of the third *parvan* in the Critical Edition might be seen as an objection to this on the grounds that it is too slight to be viewed as a *khila* in its own right but, as the arguments put forward earlier show, Vaidya may have been too drastic here.

Brinkhaus distinguishes not only these two stages in the development of the text but also identifies passages that are presumably later still: the *Mahābhārata* supplement consists of *adhyāyas* 1–10, 20–23.121 and 114–118, the Kṛṣṇa section consists of 23.122–30 and 32–113, while the later passages consist of 11–19 (*pitrkalpa* and Brahmadatta) and 31 (the *avatāras* of Viṣṇu).⁵³ There are recognisable similarities to and even some verbal reminiscences of the *Ādiparvan* of the *Mahābhārata* in the genealogical lists at the start of the *Hariwamśa* (such as Mbh. 1.70.22–24, 28, 32 with Hv. 21.10–11, 22.1 and 22.4), the last of which, ending with the Pauravas, is then continued at the start of the *Bhavisyaparvan*; Brinkhaus sees in 115.1–2 the concluding verse (*ukto यम् hariwamśas te*, 115.1a) and *phalaśruti* for this section, which would have consisted of 1–19 and 20–23. Between the two parts of the Paurava genealogy, with the sole exception of *adhyāya* 31, only Kṛṣṇa themes are found: the Yādava genealogy, the Syamantaka episode, the preface to the Kṛṣṇa story and the Kṛṣṇa story itself. Possibly the Yādava genealogy was first attached to the Paurava genealogy at the point of change from the past to the future, and to that was added the Syamantaka episode, in which the portrayal of

⁵² Podzeit 1992; cf. also M. M. Pathak (1991–92).

⁵³ A minor point that could be added in support of Brinkhaus's postulation of a break three quarters of the way through *adhyāya* 23 is that a few manuscripts do read an additional colophon after 23.122ab.

Kṛṣṇa is closer to the warrior figure of the *Mahābhārata* than to the youthful hero of the *Kṛṣṇacarita*, which was then the final addition; while the details of this process are speculative, as Brinkhaus makes clear, the sequence is highly plausible. Moreover, the *Harivamśa* and *Bhaviṣya parvans* together make a suitable completion or conclusion to the *Mahābhārata*, with a look back by way of summary over the past and a look forward into the gloomy future of the Kaliyuga respectively, and so reinforce the traditional view of the text as the *khila* of the *Mahābhārata*, whereas the inclusion of the Kṛṣṇa-oriented passages ties in with the same process that is visible in the main epic. It suggests also, although Brinkhaus does not make any comment on this, that the first two stages of growth of the *Harivamśa* are closer in date to the main part of the *Mahābhārata* than is usually envisaged.

Cultural aspects

Unlike the *Mahābhārata*, the *Harivamśa* does not contain lengthy didactic passages setting the norms for society from which a comprehensive, if idealised picture could be drawn, while the genealogical material reveals little except the importance attached to tracing descent. With regard to its main narrative content, the setting of Kṛṣṇa's life among the cowherds clearly does not reflect the standard pattern of Indian society and culture at the period, although presumably it is based to some degree on the way of life of such a group. However, the question then is how far this picture is drawn realistically by someone living among them (as Ingalls thought likely) and how far it is the idyllic fantasy of outsiders (specifically, of orthodox brāhmaṇ redactors), and this has not really been investigated seriously as yet. The cowherds are represented as suspicious of cities as places only to buy timber and vegetables (52.15) and where they have to pay a tax of their cattle to the king, but this is not very revealing. Indeed, by contrast, the description of the arena or theatre where the fateful wrestling match takes place (74.1–15) is extremely detailed and perhaps suggests a townsman's interests, although the ornate style of the passage suggests that it may well be a later expansion; equally, what is in effect a treatise on wrestling at 75.10–28 may be compared with that inserted into the *Mahābhārata* (2 App. 7).

One index of either a relatively early date or a more popular background for the *Harivamśa* is that meat is offered in sacrifice to Mount Govardhana at 60.12–18, where Kṛṣṇa definitely eats it, having

miraculously become the mountain (*māṁsam ca māyayā kṛṣṇo girir bhūtvā samaśnute* 60.18cd); the meat offering is still mentioned in the *Vīṣṇu Purāṇa* and Kṛṣṇa eats much of the offered food (5.10.44–47), but the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* avoids mentioning meat. It is also interesting to note that the prime reason given for the move away from Mathurā is that the city and its hinterland were becoming inadequate for the growing population (*adhy.* 84), while the threat from Jarāśamdhā is added as an afterthought in the last verse; this suggests an awareness that such shifts of population could take place for basically economic reasons and thus that they were not uncommon occurrences. Ingalls has also pointed to the ‘keen eye for detail’ shown in the description of the tribe as it breaks camp (53.7–19).⁵⁴

In addition to the references to peoples of foreign origin noted above, the story of Kālayavana suggests almost a phobia about these peoples on the part of its author, who can hardly therefore be very distant in time from the reality of the threat that they posed to the Mathurā region.⁵⁵ Indeed, in the association of Kālayavana with powerful horses which had chests like bulls (*vṛṣapūrvārdhakājās tam avahan vājino rane*, 25.11b) there is an echo of the *Mahābhārata* association of Yavanas with horses and riding or more generally of the Indian opinion of the Yavanas. Equally, Kālayavana’s readiness to kick the royal sage Mucukunda conforms to the picture of these foreigners as hostile to orthodoxy, as well as providing a way round his otherwise irresistible might (85.46–52), while his father Gārgya’s worship of Śiva, which produced that might (85.10–11) can be compared with the Śaivism of many Western Satrap and Ābhīra rulers. Whether the name Kālayavana and the term Yavana are being used for Indo-Greeks or for some of their successors in power in Northwestern and Western India cannot, however, be determined. Hiltebeitel, who has also looked briefly at Kālayavana, suggests that he, along with the *mlecha* forces that he leads, are brought into the story for their symbolic associations, which lie in the association of these peoples with the threat posed by Buddhism and Jainism to orthodoxy; he also points to the link between Mathurā and Buddhism under the Kuśāṇas.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Ingalls 1968: 385–86.

⁵⁵ Hein, in his study of the Kālayavana story (1989), in fact accepts Vaidya’s date of about 300 A.D. for the text and thus for this episode. However, the material suggests rather a date in the 1st or 2nd centuries.

⁵⁶ Hiltebeitel 1989: 98. He also speculates on a possible connection of the name of Jarāśamdhā, Kṛṣṇa’s great enemy, with the Buddhist concept of the *samsāramandala*, in which old age and death (*jarāmarana*) plays a key role.

Hein looks at the reasons for the transformation which brought the Kṛṣṇa Gopāla myths to the fore in contrast to the earlier Kṛṣṇa of the *Mahābhārata* and *Bhagavadgītā*. He suggests that the background to the earlier Kṛṣṇa cult may be found in ‘a decay of morale that threatened brahmanical society’s disintegration. The alienated young were in massive flight to monastic retreats of many sorts, ignoring the needs of society.’⁵⁷ Whereas it was the Buddhist and Jain monastics and ascetics and the Upaniṣadic thinkers against whom he sees the *Bhagavadgītā* inveighing, by the latest parts of the *Mahābhārata* its authors’ misgivings were focused on ‘disrespectful regimes of foreign origin that support such troublemakers and who refuse to enforce or observe the brahmanical religious law.’ The reaction more generally to this political and social situation gave rise to the greater emphasis on orthodoxy of the Gupta period which, in Hein’s view, involved ‘a widespread elimination of options, a narrowing of alternatives, a subjection of life to unyielding requirements, and the beginning of a sense of bondage.’ The struggle against the strengthened caste restrictions of this period would have produced social pressures which would have encouraged the growth of the cult of the playful child as a relief or outlet from them, all the more because of memories of indulged early childhoods.⁵⁸ While this explanation seems plausible in general terms for the growing popularity of the Kṛṣṇa cult seen, for example, in the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, it seems to imply a rather later dating for the *Harivamśa* than is likely on other grounds, unless this trend to orthodoxy was under way well before the Gupta period. Nevertheless, the suggestion that religious developments and social changes are interrelated deserves to be taken seriously.

The practices of good kings are defined as including a foundation in the Vedas, as well as the *dhanurveda*, regular sacrifice, performance of śrāddha and giving of *dakṣinā*, and propitiating Indra for rain, regular winds and so on (41.9–15). This is very much a pattern of traditional orthodoxy, in interesting contrast to the overall religious message of the *Viṣṇuparvan*. Equally, within the *Bhavisyaparvan* the marks of the degeneracy of the Kaliyuga (*tat kaṣāyalakṣaṇam*, 117.11d, 12d, 14d) are seen from the standpoint of traditional caste society: low-

⁵⁷ Hein 1985–86: 307.

⁵⁸ J. L. Masson has also undertaken a study of the *Harivamśa*, in order to elucidate what he terms ‘the underlying psychological realities embedded in the tales of Kṛṣṇa’s childhood’ (1974).

caste people adopting the behaviour of brāhmans, extensive warfare, kings feeding Rākṣasas in the form of brāhmans, ascetics who are void of learning and ritual but eat meat (117.11–16), a general upsurge of undesirable behaviour such as theft, rape and murder (117.17–22), people being forced out of their own places to live among foreigners (117.27–30) and, with probably a deliberate play on words, good conduct becoming degeneracy or a yellow garment (*kaṣāya*, 117.45ab), the mark of the Buddhist or Jain monk. Again, the story of Raji and his five hundred sons (21.12–37), corrupted by Bṛhaspati's teachings so that they lose the lordship over the gods originally won by Raji for help rendered, reveals a distinctly orthodox attitude.⁵⁹

Religious aspects

There is little reason to elaborate on the general religious pattern visible in the *Harivamśa*, since this is of limited importance to the narrative and on the whole does not reveal major changes from that of the later *Mahābhārata*. Essentially, the religious aspects of the *Harivamśa* revolve around the figure of Kṛṣṇa. However, the further decline in the status of Indra is evident, for example, in his humiliation when he takes the form of the sacrificial horse at Janamejaya's *aśvamedha* in order to have intercourse with his wife Vapuṣṭamā (118.12–38), as well as in the much more central episode of Kṛṣṇa's lifting of Mount Govardhana in defiance of Indra (60–61). It may also be noted that the guardians of the quarters (*diśāpāla*) listed at 4.10–14 are not the older group but the sons of various Prajāpatis: Sudhanvan for the east, Śaṅkhapada for the south, Ketumān for the west and Hiranyaloman for the north.

The relationship between the two Kṛṣṇas, the shrewd counsellor of the Pāṇḍavas and the child hero of the forests in Vṛndāvana, is broadly the relationship between the Kṛṣṇa of the *Mahābhārata* and the Kṛṣṇa of the *Harivamśa*. Biardeau would deny the reality of the contrast between these two, seeing the Kṛṣṇa of the *Mahābhārata* as a *kṣatriya* who disguises an identity as a protector of cows and the Kṛṣṇa of the *Harivamśa* as a cowherd who conceals an identity as a

⁵⁹ Incidentally, the occurrence of a *phalaśruti* at 21.37 reveals this story as an obvious insertion into the surrounding genealogy; such clumsiness of structure is not unusual in the *Harivamśa*.

ksatriya, just as the Pāṇḍavas disguise their true identity at the Matsya court.⁶⁰ Nevertheless, the substantial transformation in the view of Kṛṣṇa which is mediated by the *Harivamśa* can undoubtedly be regarded as one of those major innovations that have been pivotal in the history of Hinduism. Since there is a definite tendency for such innovation to be presented in ways that give the appearance of continuity with tradition, the inclusion of the *Kṛṣṇacarita* in the *Harivamśa*, with its undoubted links with the *Mahābhārata* in which the warrior chief of the Yādavas plays a significant role, would have an obvious function, parallel to the way in which the *Bhagavadgītā* itself was inserted into the *Mahābhārata* and quotes from the Upaniṣads. To include it in a text that was already an appendage to the *Mahābhārata* was to suggest that the life of Kṛṣṇa which it presents is no more than a filling out of the details to be found in the great epic.

Probably the interaction of the two legends—of the chief of Dvārakā and of the pastoral deity of Vraja⁶¹—had already begun when the *Mahābhārata* was compiled, since Kṛṣṇa is often called Dāmodara in it, particularly when associated with Samkarṣaṇa (Balarāma) and sometimes with Phālguna (Arjuna); Dāmodara is mentioned in Mbh. 12.43.7d among the thousand names of Viṣṇu. The commentators explain the name by the episode of the mortar to which Yaśodā tied the child Kṛṣṇa as a punishment, when Kṛṣṇa dragging the heavy mortar uprooted two Arjuna trees (cf. *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* 5, *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* 10). This story of Kṛṣṇa uprooting two Arjuna trees (or a Yamala and an Arjuna tree) perhaps refers to the supplanting of a local tree cult by the Vāsudeva cult; indeed, the *Harivamśa* states that these trees were being worshipped for the granting of desires (*yau tāv arjunavṛkṣau tu vraje satyopayācītau* 51.22ab).

Weber opened the debate on the nature of the Kṛṣṇa cult by claiming, on the basis of certain perceived common themes, that the celebration of Kṛṣṇajanmāṣṭamī derived from the Mediterranean Christmas festival that had migrated eastward, linking it with the pilgrimage of sages like Nārada to Śvetadvīpa.⁶² Four decades later, early in the 20th century, J. Kennedy developed Weber's speculation into the theory that the carriers of this Christmas tradition were the Gujars,

⁶⁰ Biardeau 1968–78: V, 204–37.

⁶¹ Although Braj has been understood in the modern period as a distinct locality, Couture argues that *vraja*, *gokula* and some other words are all general terms for pasturage (1982a).

⁶² Weber 1867.

who moved from Central Asia (where Christian churches were known to have been flourishing in the 5th century A.D.) into India in the wake of the invading Hūṇas; this hypothesis obviously depends on the very late date that he assigned to the *Harivamśa*. These nomads brought with them, he argued, a child god and a birth story—Herod's massacre of the innocents became Kāṁsa's murder of Devakī's children and John the Baptist became Balarāma—which was combined with the Kṛṣṇa of Dvārakā, ‘a great nature-god of immemorial antiquity, worshipped in the Kābul mountains and the Indus valley’.⁶³ The implausibility of this dating was pointed out immediately by Keith, who noted several references in Patañjali's *Mahābhāṣya* to the killing of Kāṁsa as evidence that Kṛṣṇa's childhood was celebrated in the 2nd century B.C., although Bhandarkar modified it to the rather more plausible view that the carriers of this new cult were the Ābhīras, a cowherding group already mentioned in the *Mahābhārata* and so more likely to be connected with Kṛṣṇa Gopāla.⁶⁴ Thus, the pastoral setting of Kṛṣṇa's childhood would be the result of his identification and amalgamation with some youthful god of the Ābhīra tribe, a wandering tribe of herdsmen, living originally in the western Panjab but later advancing across Rājasthān and Surāṣṭra as far as Kāthiāwār and the western Deccan. The link with the Ābhīras has gained a considerable measure of acceptance, despite the abhorrence in which they are held by orthodoxy (seen clearly in the *Mahābhārata* for example at 3.186.29 and even more at 16.8.45–65), although rather insubstantial arguments for the Vedic origin of the Gopāla cult were put forward before long by Raychaudhuri.⁶⁵

Since the middle of the 20th century, there has been renewed consideration of the question of the origin of Kṛṣṇa Gopāla, most notably by Vaudeville but also by various other scholars. Vaudeville considers the Kṛṣṇa Gopāla legend to be a later addition to the epic legend of Kṛṣṇa, she discusses the developments which led to this addition, using both textual and archaeological evidence, and identifies several cycles of stories with apparently separate origins in cults of minor deities in the Mathurā region: stories of Kṛṣṇa's birth, his

⁶³ Kennedy 1907; cf. also Kennedy 1917. Even less plausible than this claimed Christian influence was the attempt by E. Schuré to outline mystical connections between Kṛṣṇa and Orpheus (1904). For more modern views see David Kinsley (1972–73, 1975 and 1979), and Charles White (1970–71).

⁶⁴ Keith 1908a (cf. Kennedy's rejoinder, 1908) and Bhandarkar 1913: 35–38.

⁶⁵ Raychaudhuri 1920: 85–92.

lifting of Mount Govardhana, stories involving his brother Balarāma, and the killing of Kamṣa.⁶⁶ She draws connections between Kṛṣṇa Gopāla and the *yakṣa* cults which seem to have been popular at an early period. She also suggests that the Kṛṣṇa Gopāla cycle was absorbed into the cycle of Vaiṣṇava legends in South India, probably in Karnataka, towards the end of the Gupta period. This raises the question of whether the story of Kṛṣṇa Gopāla, or at least the erotic aspects of it, are derived from Dravidian culture. The story of Kṛṣṇa and the *gopīs* occurs already in Tamil Caṅkam literature (*Akanānūru* 59, also *Puranānūru* 56 and 174) and Hart says that it must be about contemporary with or only slightly later than the *Hariwamśa*.⁶⁷ There are just a few traces of Kṛṣṇa's pastoral background in the *Mahābhārata*, as noted in the previous chapter. However, as already mentioned, only a part of one *adhyāya* of the *Hariwamśa* is concerned with Kṛṣṇa sporting with the *gopīs* (63.15–35, often identified as depicting the *haltisaka* dance, although there is no indication of this in the text).⁶⁸ The more specific narrative of Kṛṣṇa defeating seven bulls and thereby gaining Nīlā as his bride first appears at App. I.12 (an insertion of the Southern manuscripts, along with the Southern-influenced D3.6) and so this clearly southern element is presumably a relatively late addition to the northern tradition about Kṛṣṇa.⁶⁹

Two studies have looked at different aspects of the episode of the killing of Kamṣa. Podzeit has argued that the story is a relic of an old heroic legend, independent of the *avatāra* myth, and that it is the starting point for all the rest of the Kṛṣṇa legend as developed in the Purāṇas.⁷⁰ He affirms that Kṛṣṇa's motive in killing Kamṣa is to protect his relatives, from which the *avatāra* motive of freeing the earth from the burden of Kamṣa has developed, and produces various supporting arguments. He examines Kamṣa's commands first for a general massacre and then for the slaughter of his sister Devaki's children (46.22–47.8), suggests that the inconsistency indicates that one is an

⁶⁶ Vaudeville 1968, 1975, 1980, and 1982. Rather questionably, in the first of these Vaudeville suggests that the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, which she regards as not compiled before the 8th century, is older than the *Hariwamśa*.

⁶⁷ George L. Hart III (1975: 57).

⁶⁸ Cf. Hardy 1983: 67–78.

⁶⁹ On this story of Nīlā (the Sanskrit equivalent of the Tamil *Pinnai*) and Kṛṣṇa's defeat of the seven bulls see A. Govindācārya Svāmī (1911), and Erik af Edholm and Carl Suneson (1972).

⁷⁰ Podzeit 1974.

interpolation, and argues that originally the second command (47.1–8) followed on directly from Kāṁsa's reaction to Nārada's warning (46.20–21). Carl Suneson draws attention to features of the identification of the *sadgarbha*.⁷¹ He notes that the question of the identity of Devakī's first six children is glossed over in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and later literature and that it is only the *Harivamśa* which gives an adequate answer with its gruesome *sadgarbha* episode, just as it is the only text to record the story of Kṛṣṇa letting loose a pack of wolves that he has created from his own hair in order to persuade the cowherds to move to Vṛndāvana (52.29–36).⁷² The *sadgarbha* story itself (47.10–28) tells how Viṣṇu thought about the *sadgarbha*, the sons of Kālanemi, who are then in Pātāla in the form of embryos radiant like the gods as the result of a curse by their grandfather Hiranya-kaśipu, who was angered by their performing *tapas* to Brahmā; the curse is that they will be reborn as embryos in Devakī's womb and be killed by Kāṁsa, in effect by their own father (since Kāṁsa is identified as the incarnation of Kālanemi). Suneson suggests that the second part of the passage (47.23–28) is an interpolation, because of a slight inconsistency with the account in the first part (47.10–22); he also points to the logical inconsistency between the boon granted by Brahmā (invulnerability from any living being, 47.16–18) and Hiranya-kaśipu's curse but suggests that it is more significant that the episode provides an explanation of Kāṁsa's dreadful deed, since the fate of the *sadgarbha* can be seen as the logical outcome of the laws of *karma*, despite the problems that it gave to later commentators and narrators.

The story of the taming of Kāliya (*adhy.* 55–56) brings to the fore the links between Kṛṣṇa and *nāgas*, which are seen perhaps most fully in the figure of his brother Saṅkarṣaṇa, who is regarded as the human form of the cosmic serpent Śeṣa.⁷³ It is the first of Kṛṣṇa's childhood feats after the cowherd community has moved to Vṛndāvana, when he is seven years old (52.1). Perhaps significantly, in view of the symbolism involved, it takes place when Kṛṣṇa goes to the Yamunā without his brother. When Kṛṣṇa first jumps into the blazing pool, he is attacked by Kāliya and his relatives, while his distressed

⁷¹ Suneson 1993.

⁷² Ingalls (1968: 388) had earlier noted in passing: 'As a child he forces the camp to move by sending wolves into the pastures through his magic power, a story so at variance with the character of a loving god that later accounts have dropped it.'

⁷³ See Matchett 1986.

companions rush back to the encampment; people hurry back to the pool and lament the apparently lifeless Kṛṣṇa, all except Saṃkarṣaṇa, who scolds him for causing such distress to those who think him human (56.26–28). Thereupon, Kṛṣṇa frees himself from the snakes and treads on Kāliya's middle head, until the *nāga* king is worn out (56.29–32) and offers his submission (56.32–34, whereas in other versions Kāliya's wives plead with Kṛṣṇa to spare his life); Kṛṣṇa then banishes him and his entourage to the ocean, where the marks of Kṛṣṇa's feet will protect him from Garuḍa (56.35–39).

The status of Saṃkarṣaṇa and his closeness to Kṛṣṇa are much greater in the *Harivamśa* than elsewhere. This is not just a matter of certain theological passages, although for example they are presented in one passage as being virtually identical with each other (51.2–5, especially *ekadehau dvīdhā kṛtau* at 4b), but is also seen in the stereotyping of expressions surveyed earlier. Thus, Saṃkarṣaṇa's initial absence and Kṛṣṇa's invigoration by his words when he does arrive are not coincidental, and the poet underlines it by repeating about Saṃkarṣaṇa at the second point the earlier statement of identity (*ekadeho dvīdhā kṛtah* at 56.26b). In another episode, the killing of Pralamba (*adhy. 58*), the brothers' roles are reversed, with Saṃkarṣaṇa being separated from Kṛṣṇa when, under the cloak of the game the cowherd boys are playing, Pralamba runs off with him on his back and Kṛṣṇa has to remind Saṃkarṣaṇa of his true identity as Śeṣa, again using the phrase about one body (*ekadehau mahābalau* at 58.48d, where several manuscripts read *ekadehau dvīdhā kṛtau*; cf. 46cd). As Matchett observes, the unity and complementarity of Kṛṣṇa and Saṃkarṣaṇa is very clearly seen if the two episodes are taken together and reflects that of Viṣṇu/Nārāyana and Śeṣa as the totality of the universe, since Śeṣa is the formless chaos that is left when Viṣṇu has absorbed everything into himself; the episodes thus present contrasting pictures of chaos and cosmos when the two are united or separated. Building on a suggestion by John Stratton Hawley that there may originally have been a Kṛṣṇa story without Kaṁsa, in which the main episodes would have been the taming of Kāliya and the defiance of Indra by lifting Mount Govardhana,⁷⁴ she suggests that the taming of Kāliya may perhaps have been the initiation which qualified Kṛṣṇa to challenge Indra for supremacy. Hawley uses sculptural evidence to establish that these two episodes were much the most popular motifs for

⁷⁴ Hawley 1979.

representations of Kṛṣṇa between 500 and 1500 A.D. More generally, it may be noted that sculptural representations of Saṃkarṣaṇa are found as early as the Śunga period (for example a well known Mathurā image from Jansuti, Mathurā district).⁷⁵

Although the genealogies of the Vṛṣnis in the *Harivamśa* and the Purāṇas depict them as a patriarchal people, the narratives provide some evidence of matriarchal traditions, as does the figure of Ekānamśā, the daughter of Nanda and Yaśodā and sister of Saṃkarṣaṇa and Vāsudeva. The *Harivamśa* declares that she was brought up among the Vṛṣnis and worshipped by them for having protected Keśava and describes her as between Rāma and Kṛṣṇa (96.11–20, repeated in part at 612*, read by many manuscripts after 48.36). Statues of Kṛṣṇa, Balarāma and Ekānamśā dated in the 1st century A.D. have been found at Devangarh and are now in Patna Museum. There are at least five Kuśāṇa sculptures of Ekānamśā flanked by Saṃkarṣaṇa and Vāsudeva, four originating from Mathurā,⁷⁶ while the *Bṛhatśaṃhitā* states that the image of Ekānamśā should be flanked by images of Baladeva and Kṛṣṇa, showing that as late as the 6th century Ekānamśā was still worshipped as the main figure. Certainly, images of Saṃkarṣaṇa, Vāsudeva and their sister Ekānamśā remained popular up to the 9th or 10th century (for example at Elūrā). However, the switch from a matriarchal to a patriarchal system in the long run brought the male gods to prominence at her expense.

The process of amalgamation involves not only the figure of Kṛṣṇa but also the relationship between Viṣṇu, Nārāyaṇa and Vāsudeva.⁷⁷ In the chapters preceding the *Kṛṣṇacarita* (39–45), the story is narrated of how Earth once complained to the gods about her heavy burden and in the course of her complaint she mentions former deeds done on her behalf by certain gods; three seem to be narrated separately—her creation by Brahmā or Nārāyaṇa (juxtaposed rather abruptly), her raising from the ocean by Nārāyaṇa as the boar (witnessed by Mārkaṇḍeya) and her rescue from the demons achieved by Viṣṇu in his *trivikrama* deed.⁷⁸ Although there are no explicit identifications made,

⁷⁵ Srinivasan 1989b.

⁷⁶ Srinivasan 1989b: 384.

⁷⁷ In connection with the origin of Kṛṣṇa's designation as Vāsudeva, it is interesting to note that Kṛṣṇa's father is named as Ānakadundubhi at 24.15b (but Vasudeva occurs in the first *pāda*), as also at Mbh. 16.7.1b, first noted by Jacobi (1924: 163/1970: II, 876).

⁷⁸ In App. I.42 also both boar myths are simply juxtaposed; cf. Brinkhaus 1991.

it seems likely that the compiler of this passage was seeking to link Viṣṇu, Nārāyaṇa and Vāsudeva. On the other hand, in the presumably later passage containing the report on the *pralaya* by Mārkaṇḍeya at App. I.41.162–303 (absent in Ś1 and Ḫ1), a younger version of that found in the *Mahābhārata* (at 3.186–7),⁷⁹ Nārāyaṇa is linked throughout with Kṛṣṇa Vāsudeva but no identification is made with Viṣṇu (who is named only as one of the twelve Ādityas). Similarly, when the inhabitants of Mathurā welcome Kṛṣṇa on his last return before his departure for Dvārāvatī, they declare that he is Nārāyaṇa, the abode of Śrī, whose abode is the milk ocean (App. I.20.1033); the general lateness of this passage is illustrated by the city of Mathurā descending from heaven to honour him (App. I.20.1082–3). However, on one occasion Kṛṣṇa is called Viṣṇu in the guise of a cowherd (*gopaveśadharo viṣnuḥ*, 68.21c; cf. 71.36b, where he and Samkarṣaṇa are *gopaveśavibhūṣitau* without any indication of divinity) and elsewhere, at 62.43–44, Indra declares to him that his name Govinda comes from his lordship of cows and that he will be praised as Upendra, which clearly implies an identity with Viṣṇu. A colossal Kuṣāṇa statue from Mathurā has been identified by Srinivasan as a representation of Nārāyaṇa on the basis of both its scale (linked to the size of the Vedic Puruṣa) and the ascetic symbolism (seen in epic references to the deity), but she also notes the absence of purely Vaiṣṇava symbols on the figure.⁸⁰

The *Harivamśa* also provides evidence for the development of the *avatāra* concept, to amplify and continue from that found in the *Mahābhārata*. As a further development from the lists of four and of six occurring in the *Nārāyaṇiya*, the *Harivamśa* contains a list of nine *prādurbhāvas*: Puṣkara (i.e. the lotus springing from Viṣṇu's navel), Varāha, Nṛsiṁha, Vāmana, Dattātreya, Rāma Jāmadagnya, Rāma, Kṛṣṇa and Kalkin, with their mythological background (31.19–30).⁸¹

⁷⁹ The *Mahābhārata* version is copied in *Brahma Purāṇa* 52–56 (for details see *Brahmapurāṇa* 1987: 816, App. 6), while the younger version found in the *Harivamśa* occurs also at *Matsya Purāṇa* 167 and *Padma Purāṇa* 5.36.77ff. (ASS).

⁸⁰ Srinivasan 1989b: 389–90.

⁸¹ An insertion read by a good many manuscripts, 479*, adds Vyāsa as explicitly the ninth *avatāra* preceding Kalkin, who is then identified as the tenth in 482*, this list, including Vyāsa, is taken over by *Brahma Purāṇa* 213. Another non-standard list of 10 is contained in a *Brahmānda Purāṇa/Vayu Purāṇa/Matsya Purāṇa* text (= PPL 514ff.) with the divine manifestations Vainya (an aspect of Nārāyaṇa?), Narasiṁha and Vāmana, and the human Dattātreya, Māndhāṭṛ, Jāmadagnya, Rāma Daśarathātmaja, Vedavyāsa, Kṛṣṇa (BṛP + VāP, MtP Buddha) and Kalkin; the *varāha* here omitted is known to all three Purāṇas elsewhere.

It is interesting to note that Dattātreya figures as a *prādurbhāva*, although his intervention is only indirect: it is he who bestows on Arjuna Kārtavīrya 1000 arms to allow him to protect the earth and *dharma*, but Arjuna makes bad use of this too valuable gift (31.93–99).⁸² The Varāha form still appears here just as the cosmogonic raiser of the earth (31.21–30) and the passage also reinforces other evidence that Kalki was recognised as the future—in due course the tenth—*avatāra* fairly early (31.148; cf. 482*, in which he is now the tenth manifestation, ending the Kaliyuga and inaugurating the Kṛtayuga). According to Kālanemi, Hiranyakaśipu is killed by Viṣṇu dividing his form in two, with half that of a lion, at 38.10 and 19, and the god seized the three worlds by striding his three strides (*kramamānas tribhīḥ kramaiḥ* 38.20d) but the beginning of the chapter implicitly identifies Nārāyaṇa and Viṣṇu; later in the chapter Kālanemi himself is killed by Viṣṇu (38.44–60).

In App. I.41.1826–1864 there is a version of the *trivikrama* episode in which Hiranyakaśipu is the opponent of Viṣṇu. Since there is no identification of Viṣṇu with Nārāyaṇa in this passage, Brinkhaus believes that it may be old and he therefore suggests that Hiranyakaśipu's replacement by Bali in the *trivikrama* myth gave rise to an additional manifestation by Viṣṇu and that both the *trivikrama* and the Narasimha narratives were then taken into the list of Nārāyaṇa's mythological achievements, thereby producing the fusion of Nārāyaṇa and Viṣṇu.⁸³ The chronological positioning of Narasimha in the Kṛtayuga, which was lacking in the *Mahābhārata*, is found then in another addition to the *Harivamśa* (App. I.42A.3), as well as in the *Padma Purāṇa* 5.42.2, although most major versions of the myth do not date him. The sequence Narasimha-Rāma Dāśarathi-Kṛṣṇa rests mainly on the sequence of reincarnations of the Asura that they kill: Hiranyakaśipu-Rāvaṇa-Śiśupāla. Incidentally, in App. I.41 Nārāyaṇa also identifies himself with Hayagrīva when he declares *aham hayasiro devaḥ* at 275 pr. (cf. *vadavāmukhaḥ* at 282 post.).

Couture sees the *Harivamśa* as a text of the Bhāgavatas, not in the general sense in which the *Bhagavadgītā* and the *Mahābhārata* as a whole are called *bhāgavata*, but in the more specific sense in which

⁸² This may perhaps betray the geographical origin of the passage, since Dattātreya is particularly connected with the west coast. He is also mentioned, as was noted in the previous chapter, at Mbh. 13.137.5 (and 2 App. I.21.376, 3 App. I.15 and 12.106*).

⁸³ Brinkhaus 1993: 109–10.

Akrūra uses it, when on his arrival at the herdsmen's camp he declares his intention of honouring Kṛṣṇa's nature as Viṣṇu (*viṣṇutvam manasā caiva pūjayiṣyāmi mantravat*, 68.36cd) and during his vision at the Yamunā river the term *bhāgavata* is used of him, the mantras he uses and the pool in which he bathes (70.10c, 29b, and 34d, also at 787*—following verse 10—*guhyam bhāgavatam devam* is Kṛṣṇa himself).⁸⁴

The earliest epigraphical evidence to link Vāsudeva and the Vṛṣnis with Mathurā is an inscription from the reign of the Satrap Rājuvula, which records the construction of a shrine, 'the magnificent, matchless stone house of Toṣā', containing images of the five heroes (*pañcavīra*) of the Vṛṣnis.⁸⁵ Two male torsos found nearby are clearly the remains of the five images mentioned in the inscription, while a female figure bears an inscription identifying it as an image of Toṣā from the reign of Kaniska. In all probability she is the same as the Toṣā of the well inscription and if so the statue was probably set up to commemorate her; the nearby village of Ṭos/Toṣ may also have been named after her. Another fragmentary inscription from the reign of Śodāsa demonstrates that the Bhāgavata cult was active in Mathurā in the middle of the 2nd century.⁸⁶ It records the construction of a shrine, an arched gateway, and a railed platform or covered balcony at the 'great place' (*mahāsthāna*) sacred to Vāsudeva. Although Mathurā seems to have been an important centre of the Bhāgavata cult even before the Śaka and Kuṣāṇa periods, the number of inscriptions referring to it is relatively small, presumably because it received less patronage from the local elite than Buddhism and Jainism. There are, however, many statuettes and fragments of Viṣṇu/Vāsudeva/Kṛṣṇa images from the Kuṣāṇa, Gupta and mediæval periods from Mathurā that establish his popularity throughout the 1st millennium.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ Couture 1986; cf. also his 1982b and 1990 articles.

⁸⁵ The inscription was found on a slab that had been used as part of the terrace of a well near the village of Morā (10 km west of Mathurā and 3 km to the north of the road to Govardhan). Excavation at a nearby mound revealed fragments of a round building, two male torsos, a pedestal, two fragments making the lower half of a female figure, and several bricks inscribed with the name Yaśamatā, daughter of Brhatsvātimitra, probably a king of Kauśāmbī in the latter part of the 2nd century B.C.

⁸⁶ It is incised on a door jamb which was discovered in Mathurā cantonment but probably came from the Katra site, the traditional birthplace of Kṛṣṇa and the oldest known location of a temple dedicated to him in Mathurā.

⁸⁷ Cf. Entwistle 1987: 118–19.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE *RĀMĀYĀNA* (1)

Language and style

The language of the *Rāmāyāna*, equally with that of the *Mahābhārata*, is definitely not classical Sanskrit and shows a number of distinctive features, many but by no means all of which are shared with the *Mahābhārata*. Awareness of this fact is clearly shown by Böhtlingk in his grammatical articles, which again are the earliest linguistic studies of the epic.¹ He was also conscious of possible recensional differences and collected material separately from the Bombay and Gorresio editions, and in the first of his articles also from the first two books of Schlegel's edition. His second article contains remarks on hiatus both between and within *pādas*, on irregular sandhi, on metrical lengthening or shortening of vowels, as well as purely grammatical features (arranged in the main part of the article according to the classification of Whitney's Grammar); it is notable that half the examples of hiatus between *pādas* that he collected from the first four books of the Bombay edition came from the *Bālakānda* (38 out of 75), as did a high proportion of the instances of lack of caesura between *pādas* (23 out of 53). On the other hand, in his third article, Böhtlingk explicitly examined the *Uttarakānda* in the Bombay edition and did not detect any features of its language (either in terms of hiatus and sandhi or of grammatical irregularities) which could confirm its later addition to the epic. These were truly pioneering works in the study of the epic diction, especially when the inadequate nature of the texts that he was using is taken into account.

Subsequently, Truman Michelson published a supplement to and discussion of Böhtlingk's data, which dealt with what he considered to be archaisms and other linguistic peculiarities of the *Rāmāyāna*.² A challenge to Michelson's claim that *me* and *te* are used on occasion

¹ Böhtlingk 1875: 452–455 (on Schlegel's edn., bks. 1–2, *Rāmāyāna* 1829–38), 455–461 (on Gorresio's edn., bks. 1–6, *Rāmāyāna* 1843–50), and 461–463 (on Bombay edn., bks. 1–7, *Rāmāyāna* 1859), 1887, and 1889.

² Michelson 1904.

as accusative came from Keith, who argued that all the examples cited are either instances of dative or genitive or are misreadings, dismissing evidence from Pāli and Prākrit as of no value for Vedic or Sanskrit and suggesting that these ‘archaisms’ are in fact popular forms; Michelson, in reply, reaffirmed his original position, arguing from Vedic and MIA data the inherent probability of such forms, though accepting correction on some individual instances.³ At the same period Alfred Roussel collected the forms designated *ārsa* or *chāndasa* by the commentator Rāma and arranged them into categories (anomalies of sandhi, verbal anomalies, metrical irregularities, irregular gender and number, anomalies of case, irregular compounds and so on) but made no real attempt to analyse the material, although he did include some analysis with the sample texts and translations published elsewhere.⁴

The biggest step forward in study of the linguistic features of the *Rāmāyaṇa* came mainly in the 1950s with a series of articles by Nilmadhav Sen, each devoted to a separate aspect within four main areas of the verbal forms, un-Pāṇinian forms, vocabulary and syntax. These are on the whole collections of data but enable certain conclusions to be drawn, as Sen himself did not infrequently. For example, on the subject of the usage of the first and second person pronouns, it can be seen that use of the dative for the genitive is rare if not unknown in the *Ayodhyā* to *Yuddha kāṇḍas*, but is an occasional idiom of the *Bāla* and *Uttara kāṇḍas*.⁵ Sen also on occasion draws attention to differential occurrence between the recensions, remarking for example about the periphrastic future that ‘we have about 77 cases of periphrastic future in the By. edition, 64 cases in the Bl. recension, and 62 cases in the NW recension’.⁶ Subsequently, Satyavrat published in book form similar collections of data based on the Bombay edition alone.⁷ Ingalls at this period, in an article mainly directed to the *Bhagavadgītā*, examined instances of *lāṭānuprāsa* on the basis of the *Yuddha* and *Uttara kāṇḍas* and identified three common types: one where a name is followed by the same word (usually in a compound) used in its non-name sense (e.g. *rāvano*

³ Keith 1910, and a rejoinder from Michelson (1911).

⁴ Roussel 1910, and 1910–12. These were based on the Bombay edition of Kāśīnāth Pāndurang Parab (*Rāmāyaṇa* 1888), with occasional reference also to the edition of T. R. Krishnacharya (*Rāmāyaṇa* 1905).

⁵ Nilmadhav Sen 1955–56b.

⁶ Nilmadhav Sen 1951d.

⁷ Satyavrat 1964.

lokarāvāṇah), another where a word occurs in two different compounds or once singly and once compounded (e.g. *dharmañam dharmavatsalaḥ*) and a third where a single word is repeated in a different grammatical case (e.g. *ātmanātmānam*).⁸

In the context of the renewed debate about the oral nature of the Sanskrit epics, Nabaneeta Sen resumed the discussion about the *Rāmāyana* in a paper which somewhat perversely took the *Bālakāṇḍa* as its starting point for an examination of whether the *Rāmāyana* yields definite evidence of oral composition but which to its credit did attempt systematically to apply the analytic techniques developed by Milman Parry for the Homeric epics.⁹ After looking at five specific passages, she assessed the variety of different types of formulaic line-composition as well as the permutation of formula patterns within the *Bālakāṇḍa* as a whole. One interesting semi-formulaic usage that she overlooked is the use of two *yathā-* compounds in one *pāda*, which occurs predominantly in the *Bālakāṇḍa* and is also prominent in later parts of the *Mahābhārata*.

A little later but in a less sophisticated manner, Robert Antoine used the redaction of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* as examples of how the *Rāmāyana* passed from oral to written transmission.¹⁰ He regards this as having been done by compilers who ‘lived at a time when a new literary conception, that of the *kāvya*, as opposed to popular literature, had begun to captivate the mind of a literate élite’, and to whom is due both the literary emphasis (along with the selection of Vālmīki as author of their compilation) and ‘the first attempt at secularizing the Epic’. Quoting Homer’s invocation of Calliope, the muse of epic poetry, he declares that ‘the language of Calliope is the language of myth’, since she represents symbolically a society’s quest for its own identity, and dismisses the postulate of an original secular epic as misguided. In another article, after summarily rejecting the Critical Edition on the basis that oral composition is not compatible with a single text and that the priority of the Southern recension is unfounded, Antoine briefly analyses some of the formulaic features of the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa*.¹¹

⁸ Ingalls 1959.

⁹ Nabaneeta Sen 1966. My own note (Brockington 1969) stressed that discussion of evidence from the *Bālakāṇḍa* should be contrasted with that from the older parts of the *Rāmāyana*, as well as amplifying the material that she presented.

¹⁰ Antoine 1974; cf. also Antoine 1973.

¹¹ Antoine 1979.

The appearance of the Critical Edition between 1960 and 1975 rendered all earlier collections of data outdated. Consequently, twenty years after Sen's comprehensive survey of the linguistic features, I published a series of articles surveying again the major features, including stylistic aspects, on the basis of the evidence from the Critical Edition.¹² These are primarily concerned with establishing the frequency and distribution of the various features, although a note published earlier emphasises the considerable contrast between the pattern of use of formulaic material in the *Bālakāṇḍa* and that in the *Ayodhyā* to *Kiṣkindhā kāṇḍas*.¹³ In my subsequent book the implications of this material for an understanding of the process of growth of the *Rāmāyaṇa* was developed.¹⁴ This took the form of a classification into five overlapping stages: the first stage is the reasonably homogeneous core of the *Ayodhyā* to *Yuddha kāṇḍas*, the second stage comprises the material within those books showing evidence of later reworking or addition, the third stage consists of the *Bāla* and *Uttara kāṇḍas*, and the fourth and fifth stages comprise the * passages and Appendix I passages with good or poor manuscript support respectively. The first and second stages each comprise about 37–38% of the text and the third almost 25%, with the fourth and fifth stages together roughly equal in length to the text or somewhat longer.

In the meantime, Renate Söhnen produced the first substantial study of either epic from the standpoint of literary technique rather than philology or subject-matter, drawing on Homeric studies and musical theory for the techniques and terminology of her investigation.¹⁵ She studies the internal structure and function of speeches and dialogues in the *Ayodhyā* to *Kiṣkindhā kāṇḍas*, concentrating on four lengthy passages of dramatic dialogue in the *Ayodhyā* and *Aranya kāṇḍas* and basing her study on the Bombay edition, though taking into account the evidence of the Critical Edition.¹⁶ She notes the usefulness in an oral narrative of clear markers at the beginnings and endings of speeches and then distinguishes three types of dialogue: dra-

¹² Brockington 1969–70a, 1969–70b, 1970, 1977a, 1979, 1981–82.

¹³ Brockington 1969.

¹⁴ Brockington 1984, especially in chapter 2 (16–61), but also in the Appendix (329–346).

¹⁵ Söhnen 1979.

¹⁶ The four passages studied in detail (and translated with notes in the second volume) are Rāma and Sītā's debate about her accompanying him to the forest (2.23–27 in the Critical Edition), the dialogue between Rāvaṇa and Sītā (3.44–54), the dialogue between Daśaratha and Kaikeyī (2.10–2.12.16) and the debate between Bharata and Rāma (2.93–2.104.25).

matic (those filled with a particular tension calling for an immediate solution), narrative (such as greetings, exchange of information and orders) and emotive (consolations, lyrical descriptions and emotional outpourings). She argues that frequently speeches are deliberately structured by means of anaphora, refrains, parallelism and similar principles, but especially by ring-composition—the organisation of a speech symmetrically around a central passage (less commonly there is no central point as such but just an axis of symmetry). What constitutes a ring is somewhat varied, since the similarity may rest on theme, mode of expression, wording, or merely the attitude of the speaker, while the balancing elements may differ considerably in length, which means that there is a substantial subjective element to the interpretation. On the other hand, the evidence for greater frequency of refrains and of chiasmus in speeches is not open to dispute. Söhnen's strong emphasis on the purposiveness with which the speeches are constructed provides a valuable corrective to the tendency implicitly to exclude creative artistry from the production of 'anonymous' literature, since her analysis demonstrates very clearly the structural unity in the construction of dialogues and speeches, a unity, however, which is fully compatible with the oral nature of the composition of the *Rāmāyana*.

A year later, Leendert van Daalen published a detailed study seeking to refute the 'polishing theory' that has underlain most critical assessment of the Northern and Southern recensions.¹⁷ Basically, the general opinion has been that the redactors of the Northern recension have removed many of the irregularities, particularly grammatical irregularities, that are found in the Southern recension, which is usually therefore held to be more original and specifically preferred by the editors of the Critical Edition; van Daalen argues in opposition to this that Vālmīki did not employ irregularities except sporadically. He starts, that is, from the assumption that Vālmīki wrote 'correct', broadly Pāṇinian Sanskrit and that irregular features are usually attributable to copyists or occur in secondary passages. He collects together from earlier secondary sources examples of irregularities (grammatical, metrical and sandhi irregularities) occurring in the *Ayodhyā* to *Kiśkindhākāṇḍas*,¹⁸ but he discounts all except those with nearly complete

¹⁷ Van Daalen 1980; cf. also van Daalen 1986, which adds some corrections and undertakes a similar analysis of the *Ādiparvan* of the *Mahābhārata* for comparison.

¹⁸ His lists of features are not necessarily complete; for example, to his list of lack

manuscript support (an unreasonably strict criterion) and argues that most of the remaining 41 instances occur in passages that are not by Vālmīki himself. These views have not surprisingly attracted considerable criticism, since they entail a more or less complete reversal of current ideas.¹⁹ The ‘polishing theory’ is a convenient term for the view held by Böhtlingk, Jacobi and others through to the editors of the Critical Edition that the not infrequent non-standard forms found particularly, but by no means exclusively, in the Southern recension were replaced by standard forms haphazardly in various manuscripts as a result of the sporadic efforts by later redactors to improve, as they saw it, the language of the text by making it conform more closely to Pāṇini’s grammar. Clearly this process was not in any way systematic but this seems to be the assumption that van Daalen is making when he contests it on the grounds that the irregularities preserved in the Northern and Southern recensions in many instances do not agree with each other. He does rightly point out that the habit of describing such grammatical irregularities as being *metri causa* is often not justified, since some have no effect on metre in any position and others are metrically neutral in some positions, and he also demonstrates the weaknesses involved in Pollock’s suggestion that the Southern recension is more conservative because of the religious significance assigned to the text in South India. On the whole, however, the evidence points in the opposite direction from the one he suggests. For example, in his discussion of irregular gerunds, he stresses the fact that, whereas some manuscripts usually have variants for the un-Pāṇinian *grhya*, in most instances variants for the regular form *ghītvā* are lacking.²⁰ However, this is just what might be expected from transmission by grammatically well-trained copyists, in whom the normalising tendency must have been strong (stronger, it seems, in the North but far from absent in the South); moreover, the high frequency of *grhya* and to a lesser extent *usya* in both epics suggest that this is a genuine feature of their language.

The language of the *Rāmāyaṇa* does indeed have several well defined features. The number of verbal roots employed in any one book is

of caesura between *pādas* (p. 76) there must be added instances at 5.7.41ab, 8.18cd, 12.23ab, 6.62.46ab, 7.32.22ab, 34cd, 36.2ab and 8ab.

¹⁹ T. Burrow (1981), John Smith (1981), R. P. Goldman (1981–82), and especially Richard Salomon (1985). Equally, van Daalen replied vigorously to his critics (1989, 1992 and 1993–94).

²⁰ Van Daalen 1980: 214–222 (§ 6,18).

between three and four hundred but the number of frequently used roots is substantially smaller, around two hundred, in each of the *Ayodhyā* to *Yuddha kāṇḍas*, with a very small proportion being limited to one book only.²¹ This clearly suggests a homogeneous core, composed by a small number of poets with a common vocabulary, though overlaid with rather greater variability in the later stages of growth. In any case, many of the rarely found roots occur only in the form of past participles passive, which is the form of the verb that is most widespread. Up to two preverbs compounded with the root are quite frequent, especially in the form of past participles passive, but instances with three preverbs are rare and seem from their distribution to belong mainly to the later stages of the epic's growth. Although there is considerable divergence from the Pāṇinian norm in the use of voice, the *Rāmāyana* is somewhat less free in this regard than the *Mahābhārata*, and indeed often roots follow the standard usage in the use of voice, and in the conjugation employed, even where Whitney notes distinct epic forms.²² In general, *ātmanepada* forms are somewhat more frequent (especially in participial forms), without appreciable difference in meaning, although there are also instances where the reflexive sense does seem to be present. This difference in use of voice is evenly distributed and thus seems characteristic of epic usage, whereas instances of change of conjugation, of confusion of strong and weak stems of *v̥brū* and of transfer of verbal stem are all infrequent in the text but become commoner in * passages. The use of secondary endings for the first person plural (or dual) is actually commoner in the future indicative and in the present of *v̥as* in the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* than the primary endings, and they are frequent in other books too.

Among the finite verbal forms, the present indicative is the commonest and occurs from a wider spread of roots than any form except the past participle passive, but the past tenses together are more frequent in total. Occasionally, the present indicative is used to indicate a past action, either with or without the particle *sma*, but this usage represents less than 2% of its occurrences at its most frequent in the text, though somewhat more frequent in * passages (this pattern is broadly similar to that of the *Mahābhārata*). The present imperative occurs less than half as often as the indicative and the optative is only about half as frequent as the imperative; forms from both moods

²¹ For fuller details see Brockington 1969–70a.

²² Whitney 1885.

are basically regular, as is their usage, although *bravīhi* is found occasionally (other non-standard forms are extremely rare). In the formation of the feminine stem of the present participle active, *-antī* is not uncommonly used where Pāṇini's grammar indicates *-atī* and *vice versa*—for example, *rudantī* is marginally commoner than *rudatī*—and clearly the usage of the *Rāmāyana* is much less restricted than the norm. So too in the present participle middle, the use of *-āna* for *-māna* is frequently found with tenth class and causative verbs; indeed, the extension of this form from the athematic conjugations seems to be a general feature of the epic language, since it is shared with the *Mahābhārata*.

The simple future is around one third as frequent as the present indicative, although its frequency shows considerable variation in accordance with subject matter, and a few common roots provide a high proportion of the forms occurring; in addition, uncompounded forms are more frequent than in other indicative tenses. The use of *set* and *anit* forms differs greatly from standard usage, with not infrequently both forms from one root (especially *nayisyati* and *nesyati*) and *vadhisyati* alone occurring (not *hanisyati*, as laid down in Pāṇini 2.4.42–3).²³ The periphrastic future is extremely uncommon in the *Ayodhyā* to *Yuddha kāṇḍas* (apart from 2.1–27, containing 16 instances out of a total of 34) but is less rare in the *Bāla* and *Uttara kāṇḍas* (which contain 21 instances) and slightly commoner again in *passages. Virtually all the forms occurring are made from simple verbs, the only exception being *abhisektā* and *abhiseccaytā*, where the compound has a very specific meaning. There is a tendency for it to be used in association with specific indications of time but this is by no means invariable. The future imperative, attested only in the epics, is extremely rare, since it occurs only twice in the earlier books and twice in the *Bāla* and *Uttara kāṇḍas*.

There is no trace of any real distinction between the three past tenses with regard to duration of action or result; indeed, any two or occasionally all three may occur together in a single context. Classical restrictions on the use of the different past tenses in situations of varying actuality are not applicable in the epic language; in the Pāṇinian system, the first person perfect can only be used when the speaker wishes to make an emphatic denial or cannot recollect the past event owing to some mental distraction, but several instances in the

²³ However, *nayisyati* and the like begin to appear from the *Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa* onwards and occur also in the *Mahābhārata*.

Rāmāyaṇa breach this convention. There is a tendency for one tense to be commoner for any given root, although many roots are found with more than one past tense. The periphrastic perfect is strongly associated with the causative and denominative conjugations, and the rare examples of the reduplicated aorist are causative in sense, unlike the usage of the *Mahābhārata*. The aorist in general is the least frequent of the past tenses and is formed from a limited number of roots. The imperfect is markedly more common but this is in large measure due to forms from $\sqrt{brū}$, which comprise over a third of the total. However, the perfect is the most frequent of the past tenses and, although forms from \sqrt{vac} are frequent, they do not overwhelm the rest as forms from $\sqrt{brū}$ do the imperfect; by contrast, in the *Udyogaparvan* (which may well be typical of the *Mahābhārata* as a whole) the imperfect is more frequent than the perfect. Third person plural middle forms of the perfect are common.²⁴ Instances of strong verbal stem for weak in the third person dual or plural are extremely rare in the text but commoner in * passages. The perfect active participle is uncommon and forms functioning as finite verbs are not among those sanctioned in Pāṇini 3.2.108–9; however, a substitute form made by adding *-vat* to the past participle passive is slightly commoner in the text and much commoner in * passages, being evidently an innovation. Nevertheless, this past participle active is much less frequent in the *Rāmāyaṇa* than in the *Mahābhārata*, even though the Critical Edition of the *Rāmāyaṇa* is constituted on the basis of the Southern Recension, whereas the *Mahābhārata* text is based on its Northern Recension, and this form is often thought to be characteristic of South Indian Sanskrit usage.²⁵

The past participle passive is much the commonest of the non-finite verbal forms, indeed of all verbal forms, but has in many instances largely or completely lost its verbal force and become entirely adjectival. While its use instead of a finite verb is quite common, another relatively frequent use is for anaphora, linking the action of the next sentence with the previous one. The absolute is about half

²⁴ This is a point already noted by Böhtlingk (1887: § 797a).

²⁵ I have noted only 54 instances in total from all numbers and cases in the text of the *Ayodhyā* to *Yuddha kāndas* (equivalent to 0.37 per 100 verses) and 40 in the *Bāla* and *Uttara kāndas* (0.85 per 100 verses) which means that such forms are significantly more frequent in the third stage (and slightly commoner in the second stage—32 instances, equivalent to 0.45 per 100 verses—than in the first). Such totals contrast with, for example, 81 instances of the nominative singular in the *Ādiparvan* alone (1.13 per 100 verses).

as frequent as the past participle passive and an interesting feature is that there is a tendency towards complementary distribution of the absolute and the past participle from a given root. The irregular forms are a major feature: *grhya* is as common as the regular form *grhitvā* in the *Aranyakānda* and in the text as a whole occurs most often in the first stage of growth (whereas in the second stage *grhitvā* is twice as frequent as *grhya*), while another irregular uncompounded form, *usya*, is not uncommon (both forms are also quite frequent in the *Mahābhārata*);²⁶ irregular forms from compounded roots are more sporadic—as in the *Mahābhārata*—and come mainly from tenth class or causative verbs. Irregular employment of the two suffixes is clearly a mark of a more popular form of language and can be paralleled in Buddhist Sanskrit. Gerundives are only about a fifth as frequent as absolutes and many, especially those formed with -ya, have become entirely adjectival. Infinitives are roughly as frequent as gerundives and almost half the instances are construed with *icchatī* or *arhatī*; irregular forms are very rare, apart from the not infrequent *set* and *anit* variants. Agent nouns are rare (apart from *bhartṛ*, where its relative frequency is due to its specialised meaning) and, as with periphrastic futures, they tend to be concentrated in certain passages.

The causative is the commonest of the secondary conjugations, with the passive only about a third as frequent. The small number of finite passive forms is perhaps partly due to the frequency of the past participle passive but over a quarter of the instances found are third person singular imperatives—a relatively specialised usage. The only anomalies, which are rare in any case, are forms with active endings, apart from one form used in an active sense (*paricaryāmahe*, 5.33.24c). Examples of the causative occur from all the commoner roots from which it could be made, especially in the form of past participles passive. The commonest past tense is in fact the imperfect (despite the link of the reduplicated aorist and the periphrastic perfect

²⁶ In total *grhya* occurs 48 times in the text (at 1.48.6c, 74.23d, 2.30.17c, 78.9a, 3.25.12c, 49.17d, 22c, 52.5c, 64.13c, 70.1c, 4.43.14a, 50.14c, 51.14b, 5.16.12d, 25.25c, 35.64c, 36.26a, 38.19a, 42.14c, 49.21c, 51.38a, 55.16b, 56.134a, 60.10b, 65.12a, 6.22.8a, 37a, 25.13c, 33.38c, 40.24c, 61.24c, 34a, 62.3d, 86.6a, 114.8c, 7.7.33a, 9.2c, 18.13a, 32.63b, 71c, 33.7a, 17a, 34.20a, 30c, 35c, 61.9c, 71.15b and 88.13b), 22 of which are in the first stage, 11 in the second and 15 in the third, where however 10 of these are in 7.1–34; *usya* occurs 11 times in total (at 1.26.1a, 47.98c, 2.13.1a, 46.69b, 86.1a, 3.1.39a, 7.25.49e, 45.27c, 51.1a, 63.15c and 92.14a). For comparison, *grhitvā* occurs 68 times in total: 27 times in the first stage, 22 in the second and 19 in the third.

with the causative), thus avoiding complications, and in general the causative is free of irregularities of form,²⁷ although occasional irregularities of sense are found, where the causative meaning seems redundant (so too occasional simple forms seem to have causative meaning). Desiderative verbal forms are slightly more frequent than desiderative nouns or adjectives but all desiderative forms are uncommon (apart from *śuśrūṣā*, where its greater relative frequency is due to specialisation of meaning) and come from a limited number of roots, while an equivalent to the desiderative adjective of the form *vaktukāma* also occurs, even from roots making true desiderative forms; all desiderative forms show a marked concentration in certain passages.²⁸ Intensive forms are very rare, apart from forms from *jāgr*, which seems to have become an independent base, while one adjectival form, *lālasa*, has also become in effect an independent form; the few forms occurring are mostly present participles. Denominatives are very infrequent, even if stems which are denominative in origin, though no longer classified as such, are included.

The nominal system of the *Rāmāyana* shows a number of interesting features.²⁹ Instances of irregular declension are extremely rare, although there is sporadic confusion of nominative and accusative plural. Instances of transfer of nominal stems, in general from consonant to vowel stems, though rare, are found occasionally; this reflects the overall trend towards simplification of the language and is broadly paralleled in the *Mahābhārata*. Thus, within the text of the *Ayodhyā*, *Aranya* and *Kiśkindhā kāṇḍas*, one instance is found of an -*an* stem transferred to an -*a* stem, three instances of -*as* stems transferred to -*a/-ā* stems, three of -*in* stems transferred to -*i* stems, and four of -*us* stems transferred to -*u* stems (three of which are from the name *Jaṭāyus/Jaṭāyu*), but also two examples of -*a* stems changed to consonant stems. However, instances of such transfer are much commoner in * passages (which accounts for the greater frequency of this feature noted by older scholars). Pronominal declension is basically regular and, although instances of the enclitic forms of the first and second person pronouns being used for other oblique cases do occur, they

²⁷ The Prakritic formation with -*āpaya-* added to a consonantal stem is virtually absent from the earlier books (just two instances in one verse at 6.25.9ab, *tarjāpayaṭi māṇi nityam bhartsāpayaṭi cāsaṭī*) but several instances are found in the *Uttarakāṇḍa*.

²⁸ These forms are absent from the Upaniṣads and are not recognised by Pāṇini, so they represent an innovation, though provided for by Kātyāyana (*vārtikas* 1–4 on Pāṇini 6.1.144).

²⁹ For fuller details see Brockington 1969–70b.

too are much less frequent than earlier descriptions would suggest.³⁰ Occasionally, the higher numerals agree in case with their substantives but other divergences from standard Sanskrit are extremely rare.

The syntax of the cases is straightforward, with little use of prepositions or substitutes for them to express case relations (the only one that is at all common is *artham* for the dative); in this respect the language of the *Rāmāyaṇa* appears to be early in character. For example, there are still instances of the use of the unaccompanied instrumental in a sociative sense and of the use of the instrumental instead of the ablative of comparison. On the other hand, the genitive is widely used and seems occasionally (though less frequently than in the *Mahābhārata*) to be substituting for other cases, which may be taken as a step towards its more general use as the main oblique case in later forms of Sanskrit. Apart from a few common instances, the use of adverbial suffixes with nouns as substitutes for case endings is mainly limited to later passages.

The main interest of the nominal system lies in the nominal composition, which shows in general a relatively simple pattern, intermediate between that of the Brāhmaṇas and early Sūtras and that of classical Sanskrit literature, but also shows certain specific divergences from the Pāṇinian pattern, in many cases common to the *Mahābhārata* also, with which the *Rāmāyaṇa* shares a number of stock long compounds. Metrical shortening of the final long vowel of a compound is an occasional feature, but one that is common in the Sūtras and allowed even in classical Sanskrit for the formation of technical terms. The co-ordinative *dvandva* compounds include some of the longest compounds occurring but mostly they are of the oldest type comprising two members only, which are effectively the only ones found in the older Upaniṣads.³¹ The *Rāmāyaṇa* also contains a smaller proportion of *samāhāra dvandvas* than the early Upaniṣads but a larger one than the portion of the *Mahābhārata* sampled by Kirfel. Among the different *itaretarayoga dvandvas*, those incorporating gods and other divine beings form the largest group and also include some of the longest compounds occurring.

A major aspect in which the language of the *Rāmāyaṇa* differs from

³⁰ Cf. J. S. Speijer's statement: 'Epic poetry affords sundry instances pointing to the fact, that the short forms of the gen. and dat. were once, it seems, available for all oblique cases' (1886: 194 n. 3).

³¹ On this point, see Kirfel 1908: 3–11.

that described by Pāṇini is in the compounds with verbal roots as final member, since a high proportion are not in accord with Pāṇini's rules. The majority of such forms are from *v̄dhr* (for example, the common *dhanurdhara*) and it is obvious from their frequency that they are a living form, occurring also in the *Mahābhārata*, though absent from the early Upaniṣads.³² In addition, the suffix *nī* (Pāṇini 3.2.51 and 78–86) has a much wider application in the *Rāmāyana* than is provided for by Pāṇini, producing such common forms as *vanavāsin* (2.22.12 et passim), but there are many other instances also, such as the many forms made with the suffix *-ana* which go well beyond the limits laid down (*byu*, Pāṇini 3.1.134).

Among *tatpuruṣa* compounds, ablative *tatpuruṣas* are the least common, but accusative and locative forms are not much more frequent, although a number of locative *tatpuruṣas* in particular fall outside Pāṇini's rather restrictive rules for their formation. A rare type of accusative *tatpuruṣa* is that with a desiderative adjective as final member, which occur in later parts of the text. Dative *tatpuruṣas* are somewhat more frequent but forms with *artha* as final member comprise well over half the total found. Instrumental *tatpuruṣas* are substantially more frequent and usually the final member is a past participle passive, while forms with a noun as final member are rare. However, genitive *tatpuruṣas* are by far the commonest form (with an average of one in every three verses); a considerable number end with evaluative terms (*adhama, indra, uttama, mukhya, vara, śrestha, sattama*) but do not fall within the scope of Pāṇini 2.2.10, while the small number of instances of an objective genitive compounded with nouns in *-ṭṛ* and *-aka* also mostly fall outside the scope of Pāṇini 2.2.16–17.

Karmadhāraya compounds fall into the categories of those with a noun as prior member, those with an adjective or numeral, and those with an adverb, preposition or negative particle. In the first group forms with a metaphorical sense, such as *puruṣavyāghra*, are frequent and forms where the two members stand in apposition are not uncommon, though technically irregular. There are no major divergences from Pāṇinian norms among the forms with an adjective as prior member but many of those with a numeral are plural (Pāṇini 2.4.1, *dvigur ekavacanam*, allows only the singular). Several adverbs are compounded with both nouns and adjectives (of which only those with *su-* and *dus-* comply with Pāṇini 2.2.18), but compounds of

³² Cf. Kirsch 1908: 22.

preposition and noun are rare and compounds of preposition and adjective are confined to *ati*.

Among *bahuṛīhis* those with the genitive relationship are much the most frequent and indeed are the commonest of all nominal compounds; within them, the commonest form is that with an adjective or past participle as the prior member (such as *mahātman* or *gatakleśa*). Forms with a gerundive as prior member, which are something of a feature of Buddhist Sanskrit, are very rare (more so than in the *Mahābhārata*). Within the substantial group of forms with a noun as prior member, the type that may be termed *upamāna bahuṛīhis* comprise a sizable block, usually with the subject of the comparison lying outside the compound (for example, *sūryavarna*, 3.21.13); another type where the whole comparison is expressed within the compound, such as *pūrnacandranibhānana*, are commoner in the more ornate passages and so are probably later. Other types of *bahuṛīhi* are much less frequent than genitive forms, the next most frequent being instrumental, which include the common forms with an initial *saha-* or *sa-*, such as *sabhārya*, *salakṣmaṇa* and *sahalakṣmaṇa* (all occurring passim). Equivalent to *bahuṛīhis* in sense but less frequent are forms made by adding the suffixes *-vat*, *-maya* or, more commonly, *-in*. Only forms with *yathā* as the prior member are at all common among *ayyayībhāvas* and these might be considered as the adverbial use of a genitive *bahuṛīhi*; otherwise *ayyayībhāva* compounds are infrequent.

Another method of forming derivatives is the use of *vrddhi*. The formation of patronymics by this means is clearly an old-established feature of the language and some common examples, such as *rāghava* and *vaidehī*, are very widely spread throughout the text, although others have a more restricted distribution. However, other derivatives made with *vrddhi*, especially those where *vrddhi* has been used in conjunction with a suffix, show a strong tendency to cluster in more ornate passages. Thus, for example, a fifth of all such forms found in the *Ayodhyā* and *Aranya kāndas* occur in just eight *sargas* (2.20, 65, 85 and 98, 3.8, 10, 15 and 60). Thus, the *Rāmāyaṇa* seems to show a stage of the language where *vrddhi* was just beginning to have a more general and productive application than previously.

Any assessment of nominal composition needs also to take account of the multi-member or long compounds (those of three members or more, excluding prepositions attached to verbal bases and *a-* privative). Many of these are themselves of *pāda* length and many more combine with another word regularly to form a *pāda*-length phrase, so they

have features in common with the stereotyped phrases to be examined shortly, such as a tendency to be reused within a short distance from the first occurrence. The frequency of such long compounds steadily increases from the *Ayodhyākānda* through to the *Sundarakānda*, with a drop in the *Yuddhakānda* back to the average of these books, whereas the *Bāla* and *Uttara kāndas* show a somewhat lower frequency (but similar in both).³³ The increase in frequency may in part be due to differences in subject-matter and this is the most likely explanation of the drop in frequency in the *Yuddhakānda*, but differences in style between different poets, or poets of different periods, is likely to be the cause of much of the variation, since within each book there is a substantial difference in proportions between individual *sargas*. Although many of these compounds occur only once, a number are repeated exactly a number of times and are clearly stereotyped, of which a prime example is *nimeśāntaramātrena* (10 occurrences); however, a number occur two or three times in one book only. Among these stereotyped forms a significant proportion occur also in the *Mahābhārata*. Indeed, as many as a third of all long compounds are probably in some degree standard formations rather than new creations.

Some aspects of syntax, relating to the use of verbal forms and the employment of cases, have been alluded to above but various aspects of sentence construction should also be noted.³⁴ Relative clauses are quite frequent, appearing in approximately one in six of all verses, and there is a fairly uniform use of the relative forms in all situations, except that a string of relative clauses in successive stanzas occurs as a type of stylistic device in a few passages. Clauses following relative pronouns are considerably more frequent than those following relative adverbs and conjunctions (of which *yathā* is the most frequent), while pronominal adjectives and similar forms are rare. Although the order of the relative and main clauses is necessarily freer than in prose, the general pattern of the relative clause preceding unless causal or consequential in character is usually followed. Equally, the use of a

³³ For the *śloka* verses of each book—the verses in longer, more elaborate metres show higher proportions—the frequencies, expressed as number in each 100 *ślokas*, are as follows: *Ayodhyākānda* 28.24%, *Aranyakānda* 34.63%, *Kiskindhākānda* 40.26%, *Sundarakānda* 46.45%, *Yuddhakānda* 36.61% (an average for books 2–6 of 36.59%), *Bālakānda* 32.02% and *Uttarakānda* 31.06%.

³⁴ For fuller details see Brockington 1981–82. See also Meenakshi 1983 (a revised version of her 1963 Poona thesis, based on the *Sabhā* and *Udyoga parvans* of the *Mahābhārata* in the Critical Edition and the *Ayodhyā* and *Yuddha kāndas* of the *Rāmāyana* in the Nirnaya Sagar Press edition).

demonstrative as correlative is regular and almost obligatory with some forms. Indefiniteness is occasionally expressed by a doubled relative but somewhat more commonly the relative pronoun is used with *kaścit*; often only the context indicates the indefinite sense.

Questions are usually indicated by some form of the interrogative pronoun or occasionally an initial interrogative adjective, and the use of *api* or the absence of any indicator is very rare; use of interrogatives in rhetorical questions is an occasional idiom. Various particles may accompany the interrogative, among which *cit* is fairly frequent, especially in the form *kaccit*, often used to ask a general question and particularly a whole series of questions, of which the most notable example is 2.94. Compounds with an interrogative as the first member are by no means infrequent and, although some have lost their interrogative meaning or have an indefinite sense, all the *bahuvrīhi* compounds do have an interrogative meaning. The indefinite use of the interrogative is usually marked by the addition of another particle, either *cit* or *cana*.

The syntax of the particles is generally simple. Use of *ca* with both of a closely linked pair of substantives is quite frequent (as well as one final *ca*) and so is its use as a sentence copula (where rarely it may express an adversative sense). However, sentence co-ordination is often achieved by anaphora, usually with an absolute or participle repeating the verbal idea of the previous sentence, although on occasion parataxis is preferred to syntax, especially in questions or where both positive and negative expressions of the same idea are given. The connective particle *uta* is rare, by contrast with the *Mahābhārata*, and indeed the distribution of its occurrences suggests that its use may have been influenced by the other epic and so be late.³⁵ Use of *vā yadi vā* with pairs of opposites is a not uncommon feature of the use of *vā* and produces what is in effect a chiastic order within the *pāda*. Antithesis is most often expressed by *tu*, with a stronger opposition expressed by *kim tu*, and *api* is rare in this sense, whereas both *api* and *eva* are common as emphatic particles. The frequency of the causal particle *hi* is linked with the slightness of the emphasis denoted; for a stronger emphasis *yasmāt . . . tasmāt* is used, while forms of the demonstrative are also used in a causal or conclusive sense. The only common particle of emphasis is *hā*. The negative particle *na* is not

³⁵ It is found at 1.17.34b, 41.4f, 2.110.13d, 3.8.3b, 4.28.23d, 30.32d, 5.2.41d, 40.6d and 7.31.3a.

usually initial unless emphatic and indeed more commonly follows the verb it negates; it is regularly put with the first only of two negative clauses, but its use after each of two or more substantives with the meaning ‘neither . . . nor’ is standard. In prohibitions *mā* is standard.

In the main the *Rāmāyana* employs a direct verbal construction but alternatives are by no means infrequent: a suppressed auxiliary or copula is not uncommon, and the verbal idea may often be expressed by a past participle passive or other predicatively used attribute, even when considerable emphasis is placed on such a word. Occasionally, however, an auxiliary is used with the past participle passive, as in the stereotyped *sāpito 'si mama prāṇaiḥ* studied by Hara,³⁶ but the distribution of this and other verbal periphrases suggests that this tends to be a later feature. By contrast with this basically straightforward style, some more complex constructions increase in frequency in later parts of the text.

The style of the *Rāmāyana*—despite the esteem in which it has been held as the *ādikāvya*—is also relatively simple by comparison with classical Sanskrit literature, and the text contains few elaborate constructions or figures of speech.³⁷ Similes are much the commonest figure and in many instances they are part of a traditional stock, found also in the *Mahābhārata*. The overwhelming majority are simple comparisons offering only one point of likeness, introduced with *iva* or *yathā*, but expressed without the use of a separate verb; however, a small proportion of similes is contained in compounds. Instances of developed similes are rare and typically occur in verses in longer metres and in a few, more elaborately worded *sargas*.³⁸ Naturally, similes tend to be used most in dramatic or emotional situations such as speeches and, in the *Aranya* and *Yuddha kāṇḍas*, in descriptions of fighting; in such situations they may be piled up almost regardless of their connection with each other, although this piling up is somewhat less marked than with the other less frequent figures of speech. The fact that short similes most often occur in the fourth *pāda* of a verse,

³⁶ Hara 1991–92. The phrase was first discussed by Hopkins (1932), and is typical of the *Rāmāyana*, occurring much more frequently there than in the *Mahābhārata* or in other texts.

³⁷ For fuller details see Brockington 1977a.

³⁸ For example, in the *Ayodhyakāṇḍa*, the majority of instances occurs in *sarga* 98, containing self-sacrificing speeches by Rāma and Bharata, and in *sarga* 106, containing the description of the mourning city of Ayodhyā. The multiple similes in 5.13 are also noteworthy.

as well as the conventional nature of many used in battle scenes, is another pointer to the formulaic nature that they share with the various stereotyped expressions examined later in this section.

There is marked variation in the frequency of similes between the different books, from just over one in ten verses in the *Ayodhyā* and *Kiśkindhā kāṇḍas* to twice as many in the ornate *Sundarakāṇḍa* and only marginally fewer in the *Aranya* and *Yuddha kāṇḍas*. The *Bālakāṇḍa* has the lowest proportion, with one in twelve verses, while the *Uttarakāṇḍa* shows a striking difference between *sargas* 1–36, which have the highest proportion after the *Sundarakāṇḍa*, and *sargas* 37–100, which have a proportion half that of the *Bālakāṇḍa*. There is a similar variation in the proportion that are similar to *Mahābhārata* examples, from a sixth in the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* to over a quarter in the *Aranya* and *Yuddha kāṇḍas*. The general pattern of imagery is similar to that found in the *Mahābhārata*, although subject-matter and other factors mean that certain types of simile are markedly more or less frequent in one *kāṇḍa* than another.

As in the *Mahābhārata*, over half of all similes are drawn from the natural world, but Indra is the commonest single object of comparison (142 similes in the *Ayodhyā* to *Yuddha kāṇḍas*) and similes involving the gods form a sizable group.³⁹ Indra and his weapons are particularly common in the *Aranya* and *Yuddha kāṇḍas*, while similes involving his battle with Vṛtra are a feature of the *Yuddhakāṇḍa*, but such concentration in the *Aranya* and *Yuddha kāṇḍas* is even greater for similes referring to Yama (over two thirds of the total occur in these two books) and the simile of the doomsday fire is also quite common in battle scenes.⁴⁰ Other deities are relatively little mentioned in similes, and similes drawn from sacrifice, ritual and the like are also infrequent. However, it is noteworthy that the list of deities occurring in similes bears a greater resemblance to the Vedic pantheon than to developed Hinduism, for example in the presence of Parjanya and Garuḍa and the relatively infrequent occurrence of Viṣṇu and Śiva.⁴¹

Among animal similes those referring to snakes, elephants and lions

³⁹ Indra's dominant position as an object of comparison is even greater if similes relating to his wife, weapons, banner and city or heaven are included, which would raise the total to 252 similes in these books (and 306 in the whole of the text).

⁴⁰ Fire similes in the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata* are surveyed by van Daalen (1979).

⁴¹ The text differs significantly in this respect from the * passages, which in general contain a higher proportion of similes than the text and in particular give greater prominence to Viṣṇu.

are the three most frequent (103, 85 and 33 respectively in the *Ayodhyā* to *Yuddha kāṇḍas*). Snake similes are particularly frequent in the *Yuddhakāṇḍa*, being common in battle scenes to express hostility and so often also stereotyped. Similarly, several of the elephant similes are variants on the stereotyped *totrārdita iva dvipah* found also in the *Mahābhārata*. Lions are, of course, a regular type of courage and strength in any literature and so naturally occur here. Similes referring to cattle are slightly less frequent than those referring to lions, showing no signs of the veneration of the cow but being mainly concerned with bulls and bullocks. Other animals, birds, insects and fish are less common. Similes referring to trees and plants are also infrequent, apart from lotus similes (48 in the *Ayodhyā* to *Yuddha kāṇḍas*).

By far the commonest *upamāna* drawn from the natural world—and the second commonest overall—is the mountain (237 in the *Ayodhyā* to *Yuddha kāṇḍas*), which is a regular symbol of immovability and so particularly common in episodes of fighting in the *Yuddhakāṇḍa*. Similes involving the sun show a steady increase in frequency from the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* to the *Yuddhakāṇḍa* (with a total of 182 in these books, the third most frequent *upamāna*), perhaps in part because it is a common comparator for the tawny hue of the Vānaras. Nearly as large a group has clouds as the *upamāna* (160 in the *Ayodhyā* to *Yuddha kāṇḍas*, the fifth most common *upamāna*), with the main point of most similes being the noise, but this group is not quite as common as in the *Mahābhārata*, where it is the third most frequent *upamāna*. The moon is also quite common (110 in the *Ayodhyā* to *Yuddha kāṇḍas*, the sixth most common *upamāna*). Many of the similes with the sun or the moon as *upamāna* are extremely stereotyped, as indeed are most of those drawn from the rest of nature: stars, sky, rivers, ocean and the earth. Similes employing human beings and situations are only a minor category, along with ornaments and jewels.

Other figures of speech are used much more sparingly than similes and occur almost exclusively at the more dramatic points of the narrative. In this respect, there is a marked contrast between the text, where the number and variety of such *alamkāras* is limited, and the * passages, which not infrequently consist of an amplification of some detail or incident by employing a figure of speech.⁴² The figures occurring in the text are mainly the simpler ones, of which the more

⁴² It is notable how many of the instances cited by H.-R. Diwekar (1930: 35–53) from Gorresio's edition are excluded from the text in the Critical Edition.

frequent are *utpreksā*, *rūpaka*, *atiśayokti* and *svabhāvokti* in order of frequency. Metaphor or *rūpaka* would be the commonest figure if all the stock compounds such as *puruṣarśabha*, which have become mere clichés, are included but is not particularly frequent otherwise; particularly striking examples of *sāṅga rūpaka* occur at 5.7.57–60 and 55.1–4. The commonest living metaphor is the sea of sorrow (*śoka-sāgara*, occurring ten times in the *Ayodhyā* to *Kiśkindhā kāṇḍas*), followed by the burning of an arrow; developed metaphor is extremely rare in the text. Ascription or poetic fancy, *utpreksā*, is not altogether distinguishable from simile in some instances and others have some affinity with *atiśayokti* or hyperbole. Nevertheless, it is the commonest figure after simile and an element of it is present more generally perhaps than the specific examples might suggest. Instances with verbs or participles are substantially commoner than those with adjectives, and one stock example, *dārayann/cālayann/kampayann iva medinīm*, occurs also in the *Mahābhārata*. Hyperbole may also be a subsidiary element of other *alaṁkāras* but more frequently occurs alone, especially in the *Aranya* and *Yuddha kāṇḍas*, where many instances are found in Rāvaṇa's boasts. Although a number of passages of *svabhāvokti* occur in the text, and some are of considerable length and elaboration, it is much more frequent in * passages; however, it is not clear that this was felt as a distinct figure by the poet or poets and some other descriptive passages (such as Rāvaṇa showing Sītā round his palace at 3.53.7–12) might well be linked with others that do fit the later theory. The only other figures occurring in the text, but even so very rarely, are *arthāntaranyāsa*, *saṁsokti*, *nidarśana*, *śleṣa*, *viśama*, *pari-saṁkhyā* and *yathāsaṁkhyā*.

Significantly more frequently in fact there occur instances of chiasmus, or at least inversion of word order, a feature not recognised by the Sanskrit literary theorists but found often enough to suggest that it has been deliberately produced for emphasis, since many instances occur in conjunction with a future tense and come from speeches, although several instances also occur in enumerations or other series of parallel utterances, presumably to relieve the monotony. As a figure of speech, it perhaps has more in common with the *śabdālaṁkāras* or alliteration and the like. Alliteration is indeed a frequent stylistic feature and less confined to the highlights of the narrative than most of the other figures of speech, apart from similes; not uncommonly it is used to enhance the effect of similes. Its use is naïve, with little trace of any attempt to employ it affectively but

constant use for emphasis, and this is equally true of the use of cognates, while the figure of *lāṭānuprāśa* (repetition of a word in different grammatical relationships) clearly owes some of its frequency to the same tendency; examples of the latter are particularly common in *pādas* consisting of a personal name and epithet, such as *lakṣmaṇah* *śubhalakṣaṇah*. Various other forms of simple word-play are fairly frequent and indicate some attention to the actual words beyond their immediate function in the narrative; however, the more developed *śabdālamkāras* are conspicuously absent from the text, though found in * passages.

As the survey of figures of speech above already demonstrates, one of the most obvious stylistic features of the *Rāmāyāna* is that formulaic expressions constitute an important element of its expression. In the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* the average proportion of formulæ, of fully stereotyped *pādas*, is about 1 in 22 or 4.53%, which means that one in eleven lines or one in five to six stanzas contain a complete *pāda* found in identical wording elsewhere, but this has risen in the *Yuddhakāṇḍa* to almost one in ten (9.25%).⁴³ If all instances where the verbal similarity is less exact and where the resemblance extends over less than a *pāda* are included, then between 40% and 50% of all *ślokas* contain formulaic elements. In this usage, a formula consists of a full *pāda* that is completely fixed and a formulaic element one where at least five syllables and two words are involved. Calculations on a different basis, such as those of Pavel Grintser involving as little as a disyllabic word, give figures of around 80% of battle scenes consisting of formulaic expressions and 40–50% of narrative chapters.⁴⁴ More helpful is the distinction developed by Vassilkov when he separates ‘supporting words’ from the much smaller number of ‘pure formulas’.⁴⁵ Although various forms of repetition are common to many, if not all, epic traditions, their roots in oral composition do not mean that the epics have always been oral productions. The traditional phraseology does not disappear immediately writing is employed and the diction of a written work continues to show formulaic patterns. This clearly

⁴³ See Brockington 1970: 210–11, updated in Brockington 1984: 38.

⁴⁴ Grintser 1974. Note, however, the comment by J. W. de Jong: ‘It would be preferable to extend the length of a formula to a group of words or a compound of at least five syllables, in order to make a clear distinction between traditional vocabulary and formulaic diction’ (1975: 38).

⁴⁵ Vas[s]ilkov 1973.

accounts for the tendency, already noticed by Hopkins, to greater frequency of stock *pādas* in the later parts of both the Sanskrit epics.⁴⁶ The steady rise in the proportion of formulæ and formulaic elements from the *Ayodhyā* to the *Yuddha kāṇḍas* is due in part to this tendency, which is also accompanied in the *Rāmāyaṇa* by substantial shifts in the formulaic expressions employed between its core in the *Ayodhyā* to *Yuddha kāṇḍas* and the later additions of the *Bāla* and *Uttara kāṇḍas*.

As noted previously in relation to the *Mahābhārata*, the main types of formulæ are those formed with personal epithets, introductions and conclusions to speeches, various verbal formulæ expressing emotion or emphasis, certain descriptive and hyperbolic phrases, stock expressions for battle scenes, phrases of time, place and number, proverbs and similar expressions, and stereotyped similes. So too, such formulæ usually occur in the second and fourth *pādas*, apart from those used after the conclusion of speeches, and there are separate sets of formulæ for the odd *pādas* from those for the even *pādas*. Another feature is the frequency with which a phrase or passage is repeated within a short space of its first occurrence, which seems on the whole a mark of the oral character of the epics. A more specialised form of repetition—with a definite emphatic purpose—is the use of refrains, which are found mainly in speeches as one of several rhetorical devices so used. Superficially similar to such emphatic repetition is the extensive parallelism of passages which is associated with the Purāṇic style of narration and is found in parts of the *Uttarakāṇḍa*; here the effect is the reverse of emphatic and may well in some instances be due rather to a relatively unskilful writer than to oral techniques. Parallelism within the verse could be regarded as the extreme form of repetition but by contrast its function is again emphatic and so it occurs predominantly within speeches.

Personal names are regularly qualified by an adjective occupying the remainder of the *pāda* and, although particular epithets tend to apply to certain individuals, there is a common pool of adjectives available of varying lengths to complete the *pāda* after a name of any length, with alternative forms to accommodate the oblique cases or the addition of a copula. However, the personal epithets in such *pādas* serve not merely to facilitate the composition of the poem by providing the poet or reciter with ready-made building blocks but also to emphasise the aspect of the individual's character appropriate to the

⁴⁶ Hopkins 1901a: 70.

narrative. It is interesting, for example, to observe the way in which Rāma's character is delineated by means of such expressions and to note the steady shift in emphasis as the epic developed. The most frequent *pāda* and the one which is predominant in the earliest stage is *rāmasyākliṣṭakarmanah* (21 times, with another 5 instances of *rāmam akliṣṭakāriṇam*); this adjective is used almost exclusively of Rāma in the *Rāmāyana*, whereas in the *Mahābhārata* it is applied to both Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna (as Pārtha), in both epics highlighting the restless energy of their heroes. Next in frequency are *rāmo daśarathātmajah* (21 times) and *rāghavasya mahātmanah* (16 times), emphasising Rāma's parentage and general nobility, along with *rāmāḥ satyaparākramāḥ* (21 times), with its stress still on Rāma's valour, and *rāmo dharmabhyātām varah* (12 times), with its emphasis on the upholding of tradition, which is very much a *kṣatriya* duty but also links with the more religious aspect present as the desire grew to assign divine status to Rāma, at first through comparison with Indra and subsequently by identification with Viṣṇu. More generally, the various *dharma-* compounds are most frequently but by no means exclusively applied to Rāma, whereas the patronymic *rāghava*, which could denote most of the major figures, is in practice almost invariably used of him, with the slight extension of the dual being used for Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa together.

Daśaratha is more frequently *rājā daśarathah* (34 times, either initial or final in the *pāda*) than anything else (indeed *rājā* tends to denote him even in the presence of other kings) and he is also occasionally referred to as *vṛddham daśaratham nṛpam*. Two of his wives are linked in the formula *kausalyā ca sumitrā ca* (found for example 7 times in the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa*, also the variant *kausalyām vā sumitrām vā* at 2.10.37a). Various formulæ link Rāma with his companions, most commonly in *sabhāryah sahalakṣmaṇah* but also in *rāghavah sahalakṣmaṇah, sasītah sahalakṣmaṇah* and *bhrātarau rāmalakṣmaṇau*. Sītā is most often *maithili janakātmajā* (13 times, occasionally also *vaidehī janakātmajā*) but also commonly *sītā surasutopamā* (10 times) with an element of alliteration (seen also in x x *sītā sumadhyamā* at 3.35.19d and *sītā sā tanumadhyamā* at 5.32.25b). Lakṣmaṇa's name invites word-play, as in the common *lakṣmaṇah lakṣmiwardhanah* and *lakṣmaṇah śubhalakṣanah*, but the largest group of epithets attached to his name are the *mahā-* compounds, most often *lakṣmaṇah ca mahābalah* but also *lakṣmanasya mahātmanah*.

Rāvaṇa's name is again one that appears with punning epithets, *rāvano lokarāvāṇah* (7 times) and *rāvāṇah śatrurāvāṇah* (5 times), but the commonest *pādas* with his name are *rāvano rākṣasādhipah* (28 times)

and *rāvaṇo rāksaseśvaraḥ* (20 times). Hanumān is most frequently *hanumān mārutātmajah* (43 times) and Sugrīva *sugrīvah plavagesvaraḥ* (6 times) or *sugrīvo vānareśvaraḥ* (8 times). Formulae for the minor characters are usually built with the various *mahā-* compounds. However, common formulae for the Rākṣasas are *rāksasāḥ kāmarūpiṇah* (11 times, cf. *rāksasā kāmarūpiṇā* 6 times), *rāksasāṁ bhūmakarmanām* (11 times) and *rāksasāḥ piśitāśanāḥ* (9 times), while the Vānaras are not uncommonly *vānarāḥ kāmarūpiṇah* (8 times, also *kapayah kāmarūpiṇah* and *harayah kāmarūpiṇah*, both 3 times). Formulae for other groups include *rṣinām ca mahātma-nām* and *brāhmaṇā vedapāragāḥ* (both 5 times and common in the *Mahābhārata*), while a fairly common formulaic element is *bhagavān rṣih* (for example, *vālmīkir bhagavān rṣih* at 1.3.29d and 4.1b), occurring mainly in the *Bāla* and *Uttara kāṇḍas*.

The need for clear markers of the beginnings and endings of speeches, in order to distinguish them from the recitation of the surrounding narrative, was stressed by Söhnens and the point is clearly valid.⁴⁷ Formulae or formulaic elements are naturally, therefore, a particular feature of the *pādas* used to introduce or conclude speeches, and there are various formulae according to the length of name (either of speaker or addressee) which is often included within the *pāda*. Approximately half the occurrences of *abравīt/abruwan* are in the very common formula *idam vacanam abравīt* (less commonly *vacanam cedam abравīt*) or in one of the three shorter formulaic expressions – *vacanam abравīt*, *x x x vākyam abравīt* and *x x x idam abравīt*, which are normally prefaced with the name of the speaker or the person addressed. All four occupy the fourth (occasionally the second) *pāda* and there are less frequent variants for use in the first or third *pādas*, or to accommodate names of four syllables. Formulaic expression with the perfects *wāca* and *pratyuvāca* is less well defined, for these forms occur as often in the odd *pādas* as in the even ones, but certain formulaic elements do occur, while the formula *ākhyātum upacakrame* (9 occurrences, with variants *vyāhartum* and *pravaktum* twice each) is used to introduce more narrative accounts. Similarly, at the end of a speech, *tasya tad vacanam śrutvā* (63 times) is very common (alternatively with the name of the speaker in the first three syllables, 45 times), whereas *iti tasya vacah śrutvā* is restricted to * passages (at least 13 times—it also shows a late distribution in the *Mahābhārata*), although

⁴⁷ Söhnens provides a clear statement of this requirement and exceptions to it, as well as a discussion of the verbs used in this connection (1979: 7–23).

the basic formulaic element, *vacah śrutvā*, occurs 55 times in the text of the *Ayodhyā* to *Yuadha kāndas*. The two shorter forms differ only in the length of the name which normally precedes, normally in the genitive, although the possibility of compounding increases the flexibility further. Exceptionally the formulaic element *bādham ity eva* x x x, which is twice as frequent in the *Uttarakānda* (18 occurrences) as in the whole of the rest of the text, may be used in any *pāda*.

Among the formulæ of emotion or emphasis are many expressions of surprise (such as *praharṣam atulam lebhe* and *vismayam paramam gatvā/gatah*), anger (such as *kroḍham/roṣam/kopam āhārayat tīvram*) and sorrow (*dīrgham uṣṇam viniḥsvasya, vilalāpa suduḥkhitah*), as well as hyperboles (for example, *nāham jīvitum utsahe*); most are common to both epics, although *tato halahalāśabdah* is less frequent in the *Rāmāyāna* than in the *Mahābhārata*. Another such phrase worth comment is *sarvabhūtahite rataḥ*, which Hein has seen as favoured by the non-Bhārgava editors of the *Mahābhārata*;⁴⁸ in the *Rāmāyāna*, however, it is commoner in passages which belong to the first stage of development, although its ethical implications clearly point to the emphasis on Rāma's moral grandeur which is a major motive in the development of the text. This formula belongs more with the descriptive phrases, of which some are similar to the personal epithets but of more general application and some consist of stereotyped descriptions of jewellery or the forest, for example. Those most analogous to personal epithets are *simhaskandho mahābhujah* and its variants, and the formulaic elements incorporating *varah* or *śreṣṭhah* according to the *pāda* of occurrence, as well as some with a hyperbolic aspect: *prānebhyo ’pi garīyastī* (and related phrases), *rūpenāpratimā bhūvi* and *adrīyah sarvabhūtānām*. Stereotyped descriptions include the formulaic final elements *vividhāni ca* (often in the full formula *ratnāni vividhāni ca*) and *vividhā drumāḥ*, and two complete formulæ, *śubhāny ābharaṇāni ca* and *puspāni/mūlāni ca phalāni ca*.

The formulaic elements incorporating *varah* or *śreṣṭhah* again illustrate well the blend of standardisation and improvisation, seen already in the *Mahābhārata*, which helps to reveal the techniques of oral composition. There are substantially fewer than in the *Mahābhārata* and those occurring show lower totals, because of the difference in the scale of the two works. The commonest is *rāmo dharmabhyātāṁ varah*

⁴⁸ Hein 1986.

(11 times in the *Ayodhyā* to *Yuddha kāṇḍas*, absent from the *Bāla* and *Uttara kāṇḍas*; also *rāmo dharmabṛhtāṁ śreṣṭhah* at 5.56.7c), while the shorter forms with other words replacing the name occur twice each (and again are absent from the third stage). By contrast, the formulaic final elements *japatāṁ varah* and *japatāṁ śreṣṭhah* occur exclusively in the *Bālakāṇḍa* (7 and 3 times respectively). The tendency to word play is also common, as in *gatiṁ/gato gatimatāṁ varah* (3 times), *matiṁ matimatāṁ vara* (5.36.25d and 65.11d), *rathena rathināṁ varah* (four times, in one of which the first word is *rathastham*, while *rathināṁ śreṣṭhah* occurs once) and *veda vedavidāṁ varah* (twice, and the short form with another word first once, also *vedavidāṁ śreṣṭhah* twice). The second commonest phrase is *vadatāṁ varah* (9 times, but *vadatāṁ śreṣṭhah* only once, and *vadatāṁ varasya* once at the end of a *triṣṭubh* line, at 5.4.24b), but *jayatāṁ vara* is quite common (5 times, with three occurrences of *jayatāṁ śreṣṭhah*) and the totals for the pairs of phrases are not very different. The third most frequent is *pataṭāṁ varah* (6 times, also *pataṭāṁ śreṣṭhah* once). Both *śastrabṛhtāṁ varah* and *astravidāṁ varah* occur 5 times, but *astravidāṁ śreṣṭhah* also occurs 4 times, so that pair is significantly more frequent, by contrast with the *Mahābhārata*, where the *śastrabṛhtāṁ* phrases are predominant; this is reversed in the *triṣṭubh* versions, where *śastrabṛhtāṁ variṣṭhah* occurs three times and *astravidāṁ variṣṭha* only at 5.46.10d. Besides the two just mentioned, the only other formulaic element with *variṣṭha* is *buddhimatāṁ variṣṭhah* at 6.61.2b (and the two *śloka* versions also occur once each); the *Rāmāyaṇa* thus has few of the *triṣṭubh* forms seen in the *Mahābhārata* (even if *vadatāṁ varasya*, noted above, is included). Other infrequent phrases and formulæ of this type are *kāryam kāryavidāṁ vara* (6.11.56b, also *kāryavidāṁ vara* 5.66.10d), *kālam kālavidāṁ varah* (4.31.13b and 34.8b), *kṣamam kṣamatāṁ vara* (6.11.18d), *jñānavatāṁ varah* (6.105.5b), *nādaiḥ svair nadatāṁ varāḥ* (6.30.15d), *padhyāṁ pādavatāṁ varah* (2.92.1b), *putraṁ putravatāṁ śreṣṭhah* (7.4.17c), *balavatāṁ śreṣṭhah* (4.62.22c), *satyavatāṁ varah* (1.37.6d and 74.15d) and *vāgvidāṁ varah* (1.1.1b), of which the last looks like a learned attempt to mimic the earlier natural diction.⁴⁹

Formulæ connected with battle are naturally very frequent in the *Yuddhakāṇḍa*, but also to a lesser extent in the *Aranyakāṇḍa*, and

⁴⁹ The group of three *pādas*, *śreṣṭhah sarvadhanuṣmatāṁ* (5.29.5d and 6.57.24d), *mukhyah sarvadhanuṣmatāṁ* (6.60.14d) and *varam sarvadhanuṣmatāṁ* (6.102.1d), should probably be included here, in view of the *Mahābhārata* parallels noted in chapter 3.

just as naturally in several cases they contain a strong element of hyperbole, although others are simply standard descriptions of the start of combat, the weapons employed and so on. Two of the commonest are *nayāmi/nesyāmi yamasādanam*, with many minor variants) and *sendarair api surāsuraiḥ* (again with several variants), while a common formulaic element is x x *devāsure yuddhe*. Other formulæ describe the start of conflict, weapons and their employment, and the fall of warriors (*abhyadhāvat susamkruddhah* with variants,⁵⁰ *tataḥ sutumulam yuddham, śarāḥ kāñcanabhūṣaṇāḥ, sasarpa niśitān śarān/bānān, vavarṣa śaravarṣāṇi, pāpāta/ pātito/nipetur dharanītale* and *pāpāta sahasā bhūmau*); the commonest formulaic elements, ending the line, are *rānamūrdhani* and *niśitāḥ śaraiḥ/bānaiḥ*.

The phrases of time divide basically into two groups: those indicating the passage of a single day or night and those indicating longer or vague periods. Instances of the first groups are *kṛtvā paurvāhnikam karma, anvāya paścimām samdhym, rājan cābhyaartata, prabhātāyām tu śarvāyām, tasyām/atha/tato rātryām vyatītāyām* and *lambamāne dīvākare*. The second group includes the formulæ *nava varṣāṇi pañca ca, caturdāśa hi varṣāṇi, atha dīrghasya kālasya* and the initial formulaic element *etasminn antare*. One interesting feature is that several of these phrases are restricted to the *Bāla* and *Uttara kāṇḍas*, though mostly common in the *Mahābhārata*; these are *etasminn eva kāle tu, tataḥ kālena mahatā, kasya cit tv atha kālasya* and *pūrṇavarṣasahasre tu*. Another vague phrase, *atha kāle gate tasmin*, is restricted to the *Bālakānda* alone, while the more specific *catuḥ vārsikān māsān* occurs only in * passages.⁵¹

Among the phrases of place, the three commonest relate to the three main cities of the plot (*ayodhyām punar āgataḥ, kiskindhām vālipālitām* and *lankām/purim rāvaṇapālitām*) but other phrases of place include several relating to the forest (*vane vanyena jīvataḥ, vanāny upavanāni ca, ramanīye vanoddeśe, aśokavinikāmadhye* and *giriprasravaṇāni ca*). There are also various somewhat stereotyped phrases for the ten directions (*dīśo daśa*, usually concluding an even *pāda*—13 times thus and 7 times initially) and the three worlds (*trayānām api lokānām* and *triṣu lokeṣu viśrutah/vikhyātah*), while a common expression of frequency is *śāṭāś ḥtha sahasrasaḥ*, ‘hundreds and thousands of times’; however, the alliteration

⁵⁰ On the frequency of *kruddhah* at the end of a line leading up to fully formulaic *pādas*, see Vas[s]ilkov 1973: 7–8.

⁵¹ Thus, *atha kāle gate tasmin* occurs at 1.29.7a, 37.16a, 62.9a and 1173* 27 pr. and *catuḥ vārsikān māsān* at 1.104* 2 pr., 2 App. 29.3 pr., 7.1219* 2 pr., 1221* 1 pr. and 1222* 1 pr.

in most of these is as much a literary feature as it is a mark of orality, which is to some extent confirmed by their distribution with, for example, *diśo daśa* most frequent in the second stage.

Around one hundred proverbs are found in the text, with a considerable number more to be found in * passages (several instances, however, are repetitions of the same proverb and so the number of occurrences in the text is 135).⁵² More than half are shared with the *Mahābhārata* but much smaller proportions are shared with other genres of Sanskrit literature, indicating that the proverbial and related material forms part of the common epic tradition, although it should also be noted that such material seems to be more frequent in certain *sargas* which appear to belong in their present form to the second stage of the epic's growth, whereas the *Bāla* and *Uttara kāṇḍas* contain very few proverbs.

As was noted at the beginning of this survey of formulaic expressions (and to a limited extent has been illustrated since), the increase in frequency of stock *pādas* in later parts is accompanied by substantial shifts in the formulae employed between the various stages.⁵³ Examples of *pādas* occurring predominantly or exclusively in the third stage include—in addition to the phrases of time already noted—the various *pādas* formed from two *yatha-* compounds (e.g. *yathā-kalpam yathāvidhi*), *trailokyam sacarācaram* and *śrnu cedam vaco mama*. Mostly these are particularly common in the *Bālakāṇḍa* but *praharṣam atulam lebhe* is commonest in the *Uttarakāṇḍa* (occurring as often there as in the whole of the rest of the text). Later stages contain many *pādas* which are obviously borrowed from the *Mahābhārata* and some examples were given in the discussion of formulaic expression in the *Mahābhārata*. Occasionally two such *pādas* occur in a single verse, thus effectively excluding the possibility of coincidence. An excellent example is *etad icchāmy aham śrotum param kautūhalam hi me* (1.1.5ab), since the first *pāda* occurs only here in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, but 34 times in the *Mahābhārata*, and the second is limited to the *Bālakāṇḍa* (apart from 5 App. I.1.28 post.). The occurrence of a whole cluster of such *pādas* in *sargas* 53 to 59 of the *Yuddhakāṇḍa*, belonging to the second stage,

⁵² For fuller details see Brockington 1979.

⁵³ For example, among the *pādas* applied to Rāma noted above, *rāmo dharmabhr̥tām varah*, *rāmo daśarathātmajah* and *rāmasyākliṣṭakarmaṇah* are predominantly early and *rāmah satyaparākramah* is most frequent in the second stage, but the more overtly martial *rāmah parapuramjayah* and *rāghavah paravīrahā* are commonest in the fourth to fifth stages.

suggests borrowing from the *Mahābhārata* nearly as strongly as does occurrence of two in a single verse. In the case of the *Bāla* and *Uttara kāṇḍas* the sheer number of *pādas* occurring only a few times there but commonly in the *Mahābhārata* speaks for itself.⁵⁴

Metrics

The metrical pattern of the *Rāmāyaṇa* was first seriously studied by Jacobi towards the end of the 19th century.⁵⁵ He established the much greater regularity of the *śloka* in the *Rāmāyaṇa* by comparison with the *Mahābhārata*, showing that metrical anomalies are extremely sporadic and in many such cases metrically more regular variants have virtually as much textual support. However, he also identified a series of irregular *pādas* in the Viśvāmitra episode (1.50–64), which are irregular third *vipulās* unless a consonant group with a liquid second fails to lengthen the preceding vowel, and a more miscellaneous series of irregularities in the narrative of Agastya (7.1–36); Jacobi was clear that this indicated the interpolated nature of both sections.

Jacobi identified a total of eight irregular second *vipulās* in the *Ayodhyā* to *Yuddha kāṇḍas*, all with caesura after the fourth syllable, of which five remain in the text of the Critical Edition (at 2.65.11e, 66.9c, 5.3.31a, 6.78.26a and 116.88a) and the remaining three are variant readings (at 3.29.23c, 6.33.43c and 47.108a). He identified two clear instances of irregular third *vipulā* (at 5.51.12c and 6.22.42c) and several more which are, unless there is a failure to ‘make position’ (at 1.53.9a, 54.3c, 55.14a, 64.6e, 18c, 5.3.31b, 21.12c). He identified irregular fourth *vipulās* at 2.4.32c (with weak caesura), 6.24c (no iambus, weak caesura), 62.13e, 83.14c, 3.5.2a, 4.7.13c and 6.40.49a (no initial iambus). Many of the hypermetric *pādas* that he noted have been excluded from the text, leaving those at 2.95.31c, 3.10.70a and 7.5.23c (the others being at 3.33.9a with v.l. *dásāsyo*, 5.160* pr., 6 App. 65.20 post. with v.l. *hiranyaretā*, 7.404* 6 pr. and 1539* with v.l. *kṛtavān pracetasah putrah*). Hopkins also investigated the *śloka* in the *Rāmāyaṇa* as part of his research on the *Mahābhārata* and

⁵⁴ For fuller details of the items mentioned in this paragraph see Brockington 1969, 1970, 1985a and 1993–94.

⁵⁵ Jacobi 1893: 24–31. He also included some significant remarks in two articles (1896 and 1885).

considers that it stands midway between the standard *Mahābhārata* pattern and the classical form of Kālidāsa and the like, while also equating it with that found in the didactic parts of the *Mahābhārata*.⁵⁶

Yardi has extended his statistical studies from the *Mahābhārata* to the *Rāmāyaṇa*.⁵⁷ By the same dubious means of counting the proportions of long syllables in the *śloka*, he identifies an R-style, which he regards as the style of Vālmīki's *Rāmāyaṇa*, a U-style of passages added later than the *Rāmopākhyāna* was added to the *Mahābhārata*, and also the three styles of the Sūta, the Harivamśakāra and the Parvasamgrahakāra of the *Mahābhārata*. Yardi assigns to his first style the following *sargas*: 1.1–13, 17 (1–20 only), 2.1–3, 10, 14, 16, 18–23, 26–31, 34–37, 41, 46, 48, 51–52, 57–58, 61, 65–66, 68–69, 73–77, 82–86, 93–99, 108–111, 3.1–15, 43–50, 52–54, 56–60, 63–64, 71, 4.1–30, 36–38, 40, 43, 55–58, 63–66, 5.1(1–40 only), 13–14, 22, 32–66, 6.1–31, 66–116 and 7.1–38. The Sūta was responsible for adding 1.17(21–39)–21, 29–75, 3.16–42, 51, 55, 61–62, 65–70, then the Harivamśakāra added 4.39, 41–42, 5.2–21 and 6.32–65, and thirdly the Parvasamgrahakāra added 5.1.41–190 and most of 5.56. The author of the U-style added 1.14–16, 22–28, 2.4–9, 11–13, 15, 17, 19–22, 24–25, 32–33, 38–40, 42–45, 47, 49–50, 53–56, 59–60, 62–64, 67, 70–72, 78–81, 87–92, 100–107, 4.31–35, 59–62, 78–81, 87–92, 100–107 and 7.39–100 as the final stage of development of the text. Among the oddities of the results thus produced are that the *Ayodhyākānda* (quite apart from being split up into a multiplicity of small units) contains more later additions than any other book apart from the *Uttarakānda*, that one chapter of the search party accounts is attributed to Vālmīki and three to the composer of the *Harivamśa* (despite the identical style of all four), and that in the *Aranyakānda* everything from the arrival of Śūrpaṇakhā to Mārīca's performance as the golden deer is regarded as secondary, being ascribed to the Sūta: the crude excision of everything but Mārīca's dying cry makes no sense.

More recently, Tokunaga has produced figures for the frequencies of the different types of opening for both the *trīṣṭubh* and the *śloka*.⁵⁸ These reveal among other things just how rare in the *śloka* metre are the forms of the opening *pāda* with the second and third syllable

⁵⁶ Hopkins 1901a: 235–38.

⁵⁷ Yardi 1994, cf. also 1989a and 1990.

⁵⁸ Tokunaga 1993.

short (36 in total), while those forms with a short fourth syllable are almost invariably *pathyā* and only those forms with an iambic opening (either - - ^ - or ^ - ^ -) allow a free choice between *pathyā* and any of the four *vipulās*. Further examination of the proportions of *pathyās* to *vipulās* following a diiambic opening shows that the *Bāla* and *Uttara kāṇḍas* stand in clear contrast to the other books, while within the core books the *Ayodhyā* and *Aranya kāṇḍas* seem to form one group and the *Sundara* and *Yuddha kāṇḍas* another, with the *Kiskindhākāṇḍa* probably standing between the two. The overall frequency of the different forms is 32,210 *pathyā*, 1,569 first *vipulā*, 1,013 second *vipulā*, 1,333 third *vipulā*, and 82 fourth *vipulā*.

The tolerance of hiatus between *pādas*, when taken together with its rarity within the *pāda*, points to the partial survival of the older division of the *śloka* into four *pādas* alongside the division into two lines. Conversely, disregard of word-break between odd and even *pādas*, which occurs almost exclusively with long compounds (in which the break is still observed to the extent that an internal word boundary coincides with the *pāda* break), seems to be a relatively late feature (belonging mainly to the second stage); instances occur at 1.4.8ab, 15.10cd, 2.5.16ab, 20.28cd, 88.7ab, 24ab, 106.6ab, 3.8.12cd, 30.18ab, 60.42cd, 71.15ab, 17cd, 4.36.2ab, 5.1.161cd, 162ab, 7.15cd, 41ab, 8.18cd, 12.23ab, 15.9cd, 10ab, 28.27ab, 52.12ab, 54.12cd, 24ab, 55.3cd, 6.3.13cd, 53.13cd, 58.46cd, 60.11cd, 61.8ab, 62.40cd, 43ab, 63.38ab, 7.15.3ab, 24.1cd, 32.22ab and 36.8ab.

The distribution and the types of verses in longer metres show significant differences between the individual books. Also, the *Rāmāyana* has very few narrative or descriptive passages employing longer metres compared with the *Mahābhārata*, apart from some of the battle scenes in the *Yuddhakāṇḍa*. Passages employing longer metres other than at the end of a *sarga* occur as follows: 4.27.15–32, 29.15–20 and 30.1–5 (in *triṣṭubh*) within Rāma's description of the rainy season and the reminder to Sugrīva of his promise, 5.4.1–24 and 6.1–17 (mainly in *triṣṭubh* with three *rucirā* at the end of *sarga* 6, and rhyme throughout *sarga* 4) within Hanumān's exploration of Laṅkā, 5.10.1–5 in *vamśastha* (however 5.9 lacks any tag verse and most NE manuscripts read its colophon after these verses; 3a submetric), 5.26.1–20 and 27.1–8 (mainly *triṣṭubh*, one *vamśastha*) containing Sītā's renewed laments, 5.30.3–8 (*triṣṭubh* and one *vamśastha*, most NE manuscripts read 30 continuously with 29), 5.34.27–30 (*triṣṭubh*) as Hanumān gives Sītā Rāma's ring, 5.39.3–4, 7–8, 11–12 and 16–17 (*vamśastha*)

where Sītā entrusts her jewel to Hanumān, 5.45.1–39 (*vamśastha*) and a sprinkling of *triṣṭubh* and *vamśastha* verses throughout 46, 50.6–9 (*triṣṭubh*) within Vibhīṣaṇa's advice to Rāvaṇa, 6.47–50 where *triṣṭubh* verses are interspersed throughout the *ślokas* (the concluding verses of 48 are two *vamśastha* surrounding a *triṣṭubh*, and 50 ends with a *rucirā*) and the subject matter comprises Rāma's first duel with Rāvaṇa, the arousal of Kumbhakarṇa and Vibhīṣaṇa's narration of the story of Kumbhakarṇa, 6.53 and 55 (interspersed *triṣṭubhs*, and a final *puspitāgrā* at 53.50) containing Kumbhakarṇa's entry to the combat and his death, and 6.57–61 (interspersed *triṣṭubhs*, with final *vamśastha* tags at 57.90 and 59.106) narrating the deaths of other Rākṣasa chiefs, Indrajit immobilising the Vānaras and Hanumān fetching the herbs.

The great majority of verses in longer metres function as tag verses at the end of a *sarga*, where usually there is a single such verse, although *sargas* are found without one or with several. Indeed, the proportion of *sargas* lacking a tag verse increases from the *Ayodhyākānda* through to the *Yuddhakānda*, with the exception of the *Sundarakānda*, while the proportion with several decreases similarly; both the *Bāla* and *Uttara kāṇḍas* have a much lower proportion of tag verses than the core books, and within the *Uttarakānda* there is a noticeable difference between *sargas* 1–36 (in which 12 *sargas* have a tag verse or verses) and *sargas* 37–100 (in which 5 *sargas* have a tag verse and there are no multiples).⁵⁹ The usual metres employed in the tag verses are *triṣṭubh* in its *upajāti* form and the *vamśastha* form of the *jagatī* metre. By contrast with the *Mahābhārata*, other forms of these two metres do not occur in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, as Hopkins observed.⁶⁰ Out of the total number of verses in longer metres (858.5, counting 6-line verses as one and a half), nearly 58% are *triṣṭubh* (497) and 36% *vamśastha* (310.5), with the remaining 6% consisting of 27 *puspitāgrā*, 11 *aparavaktra*, 6 *rucirā*, 4 *praharṣīṇī* (at 2.73.17 and 99.17–19), 1 *vaiśvadevī* (5.63.26) and 2 anomalous verses (2.108.25–26).⁶¹

⁵⁹ To be precise, the *Ayodhyākānda* has 17 *sargas* lacking a tag verse and 30 with multiple tag verses out of 111 *sargas*, the *Aranyakānda* has 24 lacking and 11 multiple out of 71, the *Kiṣkindhākānda* has 28 lacking and 9 multiple out of 66, the *Sundarakānda* has 22 lacking and 16 multiple out of 66, and the *Yuddhakānda* has 36 lacking and 18 multiple out of 116, while the *Bālakānda* has 65 lacking and 1 multiple out of 76 and the *Uttarakānda* has 83 lacking and 7 multiple. This decline in frequency of tag verses in the text is found also in the * passages, indicating that it is common to all recensions (cf. Brockington 1984: 51 n. 65).

⁶⁰ Hopkins 1901a: 276; cf. also Oldenberg 1896.

⁶¹ Hopkins (1901a: 332) identifies the first of these two anomalous verses as

Tokunaga has examined the shift of caesura in the *triṣṭubh* metre by establishing the ratio of word boundaries after the third to sixth syllables of *triṣṭubh/jagatī* lines and of second *vipulā*, which are almost identical in quantitative sequence in the *Rāmāyana*.⁶² He shows that there is a clear tendency in the second *vipulā* for the word boundary to occur after the fifth syllable. In the *triṣṭubh* verses of the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* there is effectively the same pattern of frequency for the position of the word boundary, but in the other books there is a steady shift of the word boundary from the fifth to the fourth syllable in the *triṣṭubh*, seen most clearly in the *Bālakāṇḍa* with the *Uttarakāṇḍa* intermediate between it and the *Yuddhakāṇḍa*. Tokunaga suggests that this shift reflects a trend by composers to differentiate the two metres again, after they had coalesced into one quantitative sequence through the disappearance of the x - - - opening for the *triṣṭubh* in the *Rāmāyana*. If so, he comments, it is further evidence for the dominance of the *śloka* over the *triṣṭubh* by this period.

Growth and development

The earliest phases of research in the 19th century on the origins and growth of the *Rāmāyana* have already been mentioned in the second chapter. Weber placed the date of its composition as late as the 3rd or 4th century A.D. but Jacobi held that the core must be earlier than the 5th century B.C., probably between the 8th and 6th centuries. Early in the 20th century Keith reopened the discussion on Jacobi's dating of the *Rāmāyana* and, after a discussion both of Jacobi's arguments and of various further points, decided that there is no reason to postulate a date later than 300 B.C. for the core of the *Rāmāyana* and that the poem probably belonged to the 6th century.⁶³ Keith argued that the *Dasaratha Jātaka* provided no valid evidence and that generally nothing could be made out of the relation of the *Rāmāyana* to Buddhism, as well as asserting that the evidence identifying Lankā as Ceylon was extremely weak. Utgikar subsequently rebutted the view originating with Weber that the *Dasaratha Jātaka* presents an earlier version of the Rāma story, stressing the difference

asambādhā but is unable to classify the second. The more elaborate metres are commoner in * passages than in the text.

⁶² Tokunaga 1993: 543–540.

⁶³ Keith 1915.

between the *gāthās* and the prose commentary and affirming that probably the *gāthās* draw on the *Rāmāyaṇa*.⁶⁴ However, the debate has continued sporadically ever since, with one of the most recent contributions being that by Richard Gombrich, which shows that the *Dasaratha Jātaka* has clumsily incorporated motifs from the *Vessantara Jātaka* (which contains certain episodes similar to some in the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa*, although the relationship between them is not clear) and is a garbled narrative which cannot be seriously considered as an early version of the Rāma story.⁶⁵

Hopkins, prompted by the start of publication of the Northwestern recension, questioned whether an original *Rāmāyaṇa* ever existed, justifying ‘this heretical suspicion’, as he termed it, by a comparison of selected passages from various recensions, and arguing that right from the time of the first recitation there was in practice no original and emphasising the fluidity of oral transmission.⁶⁶ The pessimism of this conclusion was controverted by Bulcke in the first of his contributions to the study of the growth of the *Rāmāyaṇa*.⁶⁷ This provides some statistics on the differences between the NW, NE and S recensions in terms of shared and exclusive material and then examines them from the point of view of subject-matter; he establishes that 31% of the verses in the NW recension of the *Sundarakāṇḍa* are absent from the Bengal recension and 28% from the S recension, with 13% belonging exclusively to the NW recension. He adds that the narrative changes very little since the additional verses are often due to repetitions of laments, consolations and fuller descriptions of events already narrated. He suggests that all three recensions were reduced to writing independently on the basis of a text which had been transmitted orally for several centuries by professional singers. Bulcke establishes that both the NE and NW recensions go back to a common source but that NW is contaminated from the S recension, while also pointing out that the *Uttarakāṇḍa* shows no differences worth mentioning. In his book, which provides a comprehensive survey not only of the origins and growth of the *Rāmāyaṇa* but also of later literature on the Rāma story, Bulcke identifies a number of interpolations in the core books and outlines what he sees as the kernel of the story.⁶⁸ He

⁶⁴ Utgikar 1924.

⁶⁵ Gombrich 1985.

⁶⁶ Hopkins 1926.

⁶⁷ Bulcke 1947–48; cf. also Bulcke 1952–53 and 1955–56.

⁶⁸ Bulcke 1950; cf. also Bulcke 1960.

suggests a date towards the end of the 4th century B.C., or less probably in the 3rd, for the original redaction of the epic by Vālmīki.

More recent suggestions about dating include Grintser's suggestion that the period of formation for both epics is approximately from the 4th century B.C. to the 3rd century A.D., Ananda Guruge's placing of the *Rāmāyana* somewhere before 300 B.C., P. L. Bhargava's dating of 600 B.C., Goldman's suggestion of a date for the oldest parts no later than the middle of the 6th century B.C. but not before the beginning of the 7th century (then defined as 'sometime between 750 and 500 B.C.'), and Gregory Alles's arguments for a Śunga dating for the core (by which, however, he means basically the whole of the *Ayodhyā* to *Yuddha kāṇḍas*) and a location for its author in the Northeast.⁶⁹ My own statement was that the first stage belongs to the period from about the 5th to the 4th century B.C. and this remains my view, even after taking into account the recent strong arguments for a later dating for the Buddha; in relative terms, therefore, this dating represents a limited upward revision.

The *Bālakāṇḍa* has generally been recognised as being, equally with the *Uttarakāṇḍa*, a later addition to the original epic, although there have been attempts to argue that it is essential to the narrative or that some part of it is as old as the rest.⁷⁰ Less attention has been drawn to the fact that parts of its narrative are totally unsupported elsewhere. For example, there is no evidence outside 1.15–17 that Rāma and his brothers were born more or less simultaneously or that Lakṣmaṇa and Śatrughna are twins, which contrasts with Kuśa and Lava being emphatically called *yamajāta* in the *Uttarakāṇḍa* and Lakṣmaṇa and Śatrughna themselves being explicitly called twins by Kālidāsa (*Raghuvanśa* 10.71). Nor is there any reference elsewhere in

⁶⁹ See Grintser 1974: 136–152, Guruge 1991: 38, Bhargava 1965, *Rāmāyana* 1984: I, 22–23, Alles 1988–89.

⁷⁰ An example of the first trend is that Ramashraya Sharma (1971: 6–7) finds references to the *Bālakāṇḍa* at 2.110.36–50 (Sītā's account of Rāma bending Śiva's bow) and 3.36.3–16 (Mārīca's account of his previous encounter with Rāma), and to the *Uttarakāṇḍa* at 5.2.19–20 (Laṅkā built by Viśvakarman and formerly occupied by Kubera), 8.14 (Rāvaṇa scarred by Viṣṇu's *cakra*), 44.7–8 (Rāvaṇa's conquest of the gods), 49.24–26 (Rāma is human and Sugrīva a monkey—implying Rāvaṇa's boon) and 1031* 2–3 (the shaking of Kailāsa). Similarly, Goldman (*Rāmāyana* 1984: I, 64) asserts that the "genuine" books contain at least two references to the events of Book One', citing the same two passages and noting their close similarities with the relevant *Bālakāṇḍa* passages; however, by declaring that these passages are summarising the *Bālakāṇḍa* material he prejudices the issue of the direction of borrowing. More probably, the *Bāla* and *Uttara kāṇḍa* passages are expanding on the hints in the other books.

the Vālmīki *Rāmāyaṇa* to Daśaratha's impotence and their miraculous birth, not even in Daśaratha's dying look back over his past (2.57–58).

Before the middle of the 19th century, the older Holtzmann noted in passing the inferior style of the *Bālakāṇḍa* by comparison with the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa*, the duplication involved in the *aśvamedha* and the *putreṣṭi* and the respective roles of Vasiṣṭha and Rṣyaśrṅga, and the generally Purāṇic character of its contents.⁷¹ Jacobi, who was the first to demonstrate in detail the overall lateness of the *Bālakāṇḍa*, nevertheless postulates an early date for a brief passage which he believed was prefixed to the present *Ayodhyākāṇḍa*, to remedy the perceived abruptness of the opening of the story there.⁷² The passage that he reconstructed comprises 1.5.1–9, 6.2–4, 17.10, 11c–12d, 14, 13 and 17, which clearly is an introduction, but to the *Bālakāṇḍa* alone.⁷³ Its style is quite different from that of the early *Rāmāyaṇa* but similar to the more elaborate style of the second stage. More recently, Vekerdi has suggested that *sargas* 5–7, though subject to some expansion (especially in *sarga* 7), belong with the older books; he notes their more elaborate style and also the verse in longer metre concluding each, as is usual in the older books.⁷⁴ The contrast with the immediately following Rṣyaśrṅga episode (1.8–10), to which Vekerdi draws attention, is indeed very marked, for this shows a very simple and flat style. He also discusses the problems of how to link the presumed original beginning of the epic with the start of the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa*, which presupposes certain events told in the last chapter of the *Bālakāṇḍa*. Goldman suggests that the *Bālakāṇḍa* has developed gradually, over a period of perhaps several centuries, with the substantial parts dealing with Rāma's early exploits probably forming 'part of the original stratum of the epic'.⁷⁵

The basic purpose for the addition of the *Bālakāṇḍa* is to provide a curious audience with information on Rāma's birth, youthful exploits and marriage, while at the same time giving to Rāma the enhanced status that was by then being assigned to him. Some of its incidents

⁷¹ Holtzmann sen. 1841: 36–38.

⁷² Jacobi 1893: 50–59.

⁷³ G. H. Bhatt suggests as much for the first part of this passage in his Critical Notes on the *Bālakāṇḍa* (*Rāmāyaṇa* 1960–75: 424 and 435). Incidentally, Herman Lommel deals with the legends of the enmity between Vasiṣṭha and Viśvāmitra in a series of texts, including the *Bālakāṇḍa* (1965–66).

⁷⁴ Vekerdi 1966.

⁷⁵ *Rāmāyaṇa* 1984: 60–81.

are clearly elaborated out of suggestions in the main narrative, while others are purely fanciful, and others again are peripheral to the main story and are closer to Purāṇic than epic narrative. The *Bālakānda* evidently has grown from a number of virtually independent episodes over a considerable period of time and the recognition that it and the *Uttarakānda* are later should not be allowed to obscure the fact that there are many differences between them and within each. Its definitive fixing in its present form is placed by Bulcke in the 1st century A.D. and by various other scholars at different dates up to the 4th century A.D. Söhnen looks at the summaries at the beginning of the *Bālakānda* and suggests that *sarga* 1, the *Samkṣipta Rāmāyaṇa*, which shows no awareness either of the rest of the *Bālakānda* or of Rāma as an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu, was not originally meant as an introduction to the epic but represents a slightly different version current even after the composition of the Vālmīki *Rāmāyaṇa*.⁷⁶ It was later adapted to the *Rāmāyaṇa* when it was included—later than the summary in catchwords in *sarga* 3—in order to explain how Vālmīki gained his knowledge about the events of Rāma's life. Vaudeville discusses the *krauñcavadha* episode in *sarga* 2 and as a result posits by analogy with the *krauñci* as heroine of the tale a stage in the epic when ‘the *pativrata* Sītā was the central figure’, while she also distinguishes a kind of double prologue, one giving a mythological explanation of the origin of the Rāma legend (1.1, 1. 2.22–37 apart from 27–28, and 1.3.1–2) and one naturalistic (1.2.3–21, 27–28, 38–40 and 1.4); Stephen Roney seeks to interpret the *Rāmāyaṇa* as an aesthetic experience, in which the *krauñca* episode provides the symbolic key, the two birds furnishing the motif of alternating ‘pairing’ and opposition.⁷⁷ The familiarity with the *rasa* theory shown by this account of Vālmīki's discovery of the *śloka* is enough to mark it as late.

Earlier, Lüders demonstrated that the form of the Rṣyaśṛṅga episode (1.8–10) was later than the versions in the *Mahābhārata* (3.110–3) and the *Padma Purāṇa*.⁷⁸ Even earlier, Lassen had pointed out the awkwardness with which the *putreṣṭi* performed by Rṣyaśṛṅga (1.14) follows

⁷⁶ Söhnen 1978.

⁷⁷ Vaudeville 1963, also 1961–62; Roney 1982–83. The episode is also discussed by Bernhard Kölver (1985) and, in relation to Abhinavagupta's reference to it, by Masson (1968).

⁷⁸ Lüders 1897. Georg von Simson also studies the Rṣyaśṛṅga story and interprets it as the marriage of the earth to the moon, the whole forming a rain myth (1986).

the *aśvamedha* (1.11–13) in the account of Daśaratha's sacrifices and the abruptness of the insertion of the Paraśurāma episode (1.73–75).⁷⁹ He notes that both episodes are intended to affirm Rāma's status as an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu, which is not otherwise explicitly claimed in the *Bālakāṇḍa*. Incidentally, Asoke Chatterjee demonstrates that the Northern version of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, which makes Śāntā the adopted daughter of Lomapāda of Arīga, does so through confusion and thus the Southern version, where she is his own daughter, is more original; he pinpoints the probable cause as conflation of Daśaratha Lomapāda with Daśaratha of Ayodhyā.⁸⁰

The entire Viśvāmitra episode (1.31–64) lacks direct relevance to the main story and G. H. Bhatt in effect suggests its omission by stating that *sarga* 65 should naturally follow *sarga* 30.⁸¹ On the other hand, Goldman has pointed out that, as Jacobi first noticed, the description of the region through which Rāma is led by Viśvāmitra seems to reflect a time before the rise of Buddhism and of Magadhan supremacy (1.34, also 1.46–47).⁸² However, the episode is itself composed of separate elements, such as the story of Sagara (1.37–43) and Śatānanda's account of Viśvāmitra's history (1.50–64); indeed, since *sarga* 49 is relevant for the later arrival in Mithilā and also refers back to events narrated earlier, while 1.50.18–28 repeats *sarga* 33, the process of compilation is still fairly transparent. Lesný demonstrates the correspondence of parts of the story of Sagara and Asamañjas with the versions found in the *Harivamśa* (10.56–64 with 218*–22*) and *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* (4.4.1–3) and concludes that they derive from a common source, as well as emphasising the Purāṇic character of the *Bālakāṇḍa*.⁸³ Subsequently Kirfel compared the story of Sagara's sons (1.37–43) and the story of Diti and Indra (1.45) with the *Brahmāṇḍa* and *Vāyu Purāṇas* (also Mbh. 3.106), argued that its author knew the *Vāyu Purāṇa* in something like its present form, and so assigned the *Bālakāṇḍa* as a whole (rather than the specific episodes)

⁷⁹ Lassen 1866: I, 586–87. Satyavrat Shastri shows that the explanations of the commentaries providing motivation for the *aśvamedha* are in contradiction with the text and suggests that 'the redactor who grafted the Rṣyaśrīga narrative was an Atharvavedin', on the basis of *atharvaśrīsi proktair mantraiḥ* at 1.14.2cd, and that he wanted 'to show the equal importance of his Veda along with the Rgveda' (Satyavrat 1978: 282).

⁸⁰ Chatterjee 1954.

⁸¹ *Rāmāyaṇa* 1960–75: I, 456.

⁸² *Rāmāyaṇa* 1984–: I, 21–22.

⁸³ Lesný 1913.

to the second half of the 4th century A.D.⁸⁴ As noted in the previous section, Jacobi pointed out a series of metrically irregular *pādas* in the Viśvāmitra episode and the number of Purānic-style accounts in it suggest a relatively late date for much at least of it. In the middle of the 19th century, R. Roth stressed that the version of the Śunahṣepa legend (1.60–61) is quite different from the older one of the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa*, and also dealt with the legend of Triśaṅku (1.56–59), noting the great differences between the *Rāmāyana* and the *Harivamśa*, and argued that it may be a distortion of the Śunahṣepa legend.⁸⁵

Textual repetition between the last *sarga* of the *Bālakāṇḍa* and the first *sarga* of the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* probably points to the separation of what once formed a single passage, as is also suggested by the variation between the recensions over just where the division between the two books is made. More generally, it is clear that the opening of the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* has been extensively reworked, on the evidence of its language and style, and roughly the first thirty *sargas*, narrating the intrigues that lead to Rāma's banishment, have been so altered or inflated as to bear little stylistic relationship to the core of the *Rāmāyana*; they thus constitute the first of the expansions and additions which form the second stage of growth of the text, to be surveyed next.⁸⁶ The extreme length of *sarga* 46, narrating Sumantra's return and the exiles' crossing of the Gaṅgā, suggests that it has been greatly expanded at a relatively late date, after the division into *sargas* had become established; whereas it is integral to the narrative, the next *sarga* (47, containing Rāma's lament) is peripheral and may well be an interpolation—certainly the pessimism attributed here to Rāma is out of character with the usual portrayal of him. 2.57–58, in which Daśaratha narrates his former misdeed and the curse by which he is now dying separated from his son, have certainly been greatly expanded, if indeed the whole passage, with the exception of Daśaratha's death itself, has not simply been inserted; Pollock, noting the similarities to the *Sāma Jātaka*, suggests that as their prototype.⁸⁷ The description of the evils of a kingless state at 2.61 is largely identical

⁸⁴ Kirsch 1947.

⁸⁵ Roth 1850–53. On Triśaṅku (1.57–60) compare also the analysis by Shulman (1985: 236–37).

⁸⁶ Detailed arguments for the material presented in this and the next few pages are contained in Brockington 1984 (and summarised in the Appendix, pp. 329–346). For a detailed study of various textual points in the constituted text of the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa*, see Pollock 1979.

⁸⁷ *Rāmāyana* 1984–: II, 37 and 62.

with Mbh. 12.67–68, with additional parallels with Mbh. 12.15.32–33, and this kind of semi-proverbial material is hardly likely to have formed part of either epic originally. The account of Bharata's return and his rejection of his mother's actions in 2.65–69 have clearly been greatly expanded in the second stage of growth, while Hopkins recognised the Surabhi episode, referred to in 68.15–24, as an insertion derived from Mbh. 3.10.5–18,⁸⁸ and many of Bharata's curses in *sarga* 69 have close parallels in Mbh. 13.95–96. The description of the construction of the royal road at 2.74 and the account of Bharadvāja's entertainment of Bharata's army at 2.85 are both obvious interpolations, showing features of vocabulary and style unexampled elsewhere. The exceptionally high proportions of long compounds in 2.88–89 (in which Rāma points out the beauties of Citrakūṭa to Sītā and expresses his joy at living there in her company) and the elaborate figures of speech indicate their ornate character, typical of the second stage of growth. The *kaccit* chapter is undoubtedly an intrusion into both the *Rāmāyaṇa* (2.94) and the *Mahābhārata* (2.5), with virtually identical wording in both. 2.95, in which Rāma learns of Daśaratha's death, seems to have been greatly expanded. In *sargas* 98 to 102 are narrated repeated pleas to Rāma to return and there has clearly been considerable expansion or addition here; Jacobi suggests that 2.99.17–103.11 were interpolated, with Vasiṣṭha's speech in 2.102 forming an interpolation within the interpolation, while Söhnens suggests that the basic dialogue between Rāma and Bharata may originally have consisted only of the speeches in *sarga* 97 and 104.9–22, and Pollock suggests that the tradition of the wise Rāma, preserved in the *gāthās* of the *Dasaratha Jātaka*, seems to have been adapted in 98.15ff.⁸⁹ Jacobi also commented on the occurrence of 16 similes in as many verses in *sarga* 106 and this and the next two *sargas* have clearly been expanded by later reciters or poets keen to elaborate the description of the mourning town of Ayodhyā, the enthronement of the sandals and the fears expressed by the ascetics living on Citrakūṭa. The account of Sītā's meeting and conversation with Anasūyā at 2.110–111 has little real connection with the main narrative and Bulcke has rightly identified the

⁸⁸ Hopkins 1899.

⁸⁹ Jacobi 1893: 88–89, Söhnens 1979: 199, and *Rāmāyaṇa* 1984–: II, 38 and 504–05 (but contrast Gombrich 1985 mentioned above, n. 65). Ruben (1964–65) notes that Jābāli's speech at 2.100 is absent both from the *Rāmopākhyāna* and from the *Raghuvamśa*.

episode as a late interpolation on grounds of subject matter;⁹⁰ this is confirmed by the general lateness of language and style.

The first four *sargas* of the *Aranyakānda* have clearly suffered from inflation on the evidence of their language and style; the description of the Dāṇḍakāranya hermitage, especially 3.1.3–10, is exceptionally florid and is paralleled in Mbh. 3.145.25–32; the Virādha episode in the second and third *sargas* may well be an anticipation of Śūrpaṇakhā's attack later; and Indra's visit to Śarabhaṅga's hermitage in *sarga* 4 seems meant to enhance Rāma's significance in a manner more typical of the second stage. Sītā's attempt to dissuade Rāma from killing Rākṣasas and his reply in 3.8–9 are an obvious attempt at an ethical justification of Rāma's conduct, belonging to a later stage, while the next two *sargas*, 3.10–11, narrating Rāma's visit to Agastya and Agastya's gift of divine weapons, betray their lateness by over-use of supposedly epic features and frequent mention of Viṣṇu. Jaṭāyus' genealogy at 3.13 has pronounced cosmogonic overtones, as well as parallels with the *Mahābhārata* and several grammatical irregularities, together suggestive of a late addition. Lakṣmaṇa's description of winter at 3.15 contains a plethora of more elaborate figures of speech, especially *svabhāvokti*, and clearly reflects later urges to produce a *kāvya*. There has probably been some expansion throughout the passage narrating the conflicts with various Rākṣasas, 3.24–29, but the *sargas* which show the clearest stylistic evidence of this are 25 and 28–29; similarly, the account in the next *sarga* of Śūrpaṇakhā going to Rāvaṇa to seek vengeance has obviously been expanded and 3.30.4–20 in particular, describing Rāvaṇa's past exploits, are ornate in style. Goldman and Masson examine Rāma's encounter with Śūrpaṇakhā within the narrative as a whole (including her introducing herself as Rāvaṇa's sister at 3.16.18–19), ask why everyone seems ignorant of where Rāvaṇa lives, and conclude that originally the epic was 'not a reflection of "high" mythology' nor a 'representation of a primal conflict between the gods (and men) and the demons' but 'a product (doubtless much altered with time) of relatively simple bardic or even folkloric story-tellings'.⁹¹ Ignorance of Rāvaṇa and his whereabouts subsequently is, however, essentially for narrative and artistic reasons, as Mary Brockington has pointed out.⁹²

⁹⁰ Bulcke 1952.

⁹¹ Goldman and Masson 1969; cf. also van Daalen 1980: 140–65.

⁹² Personal communication. Goldman and Masson themselves begin their study by saying that 'virtually nobody, with the interesting (and narratively essential)

The reason why Rāma has to forget the Śūrpaṇakhā incident (and the far more serious slaughter of Khara, Dūṣaṇa and the other Rāksasas) is so that later he shall have no forebodings of danger to Sītā and thereby be open to accusations of carelessness.

Incidentally, to digress briefly, this is not the only narrative inconsistency in the *Rāmāyaṇa* and its ramifications are extensive: not only has Rāma later forgotten all about Śūrpaṇakhā naming Rāvaṇa as her brother, when at 3.64.5–7 he asks why Rāvaṇa should have carried Sītā off and who he is, but it is presupposed also at 3.67.19–23 (Kabandha's information), 4.6.20–21 (Sugrīva's ignorance) and 57.19–20 (Saṃpāti's revelation of Rāvaṇa's location). Elsewhere, for example, at 3.44 Sītā refrains from revealing to Rāvaṇa that Rāma has gone after the golden deer, which implies a certain suspicion about his motives which runs counter to the overall presentation of her behaviour towards the supposed mendicant. Subsequently, Saṃpāti describes having seen Rāvana going apparently on foot or at least on the ground with Sītā at 4.58.15cd (contrast the Northern substitute passage 1215*), as well as seeming to compress the sky by his momentum (4.58.18b). When Hanumān approaches Sītā, she is first of all unornamented (5.13.20c, 35b and 37—the last confirmed by a simile in cd), then ornamented (39–42), and again unornamented at 5.15.30b; on this occasion the most likely explanation for the discrepancy is that at least 5.13.39–42 are a later expansion and quite probably 38–49 (for which there is also some manuscript evidence).⁹³ Most obviously, Laṅkā, though burnt down by Hanumān when Rāvaṇa has his tail set alight (at 5.52), is still standing in all its strength and grandeur when Rāma arrives with the Vānara army (6.30).⁹⁴ Such inconsistency is natural and inevitable in an oral composition ('even Homer nods'), where it is the overall plot that matters and not the minutiae of its details.

Ravaṇa's journey to Mārīca includes an obviously late insertion on Garuḍa's exploits at 3.33.28–34, although *sarga* 33 as a whole is

exception of the vulture king Jaṭāyu and his brother Saṃpāti, seems to know who Rāvaṇa is' (1969: 95), but they fail to follow up this insight, preferring to see in it a sign of the original obscurity of Rāvaṇa, who has been exalted in status as Rāma's grandeur has increased (a valid but unremarkable point).

⁹³ Hiltebeitel, however (1980–81), proposes a symbolic meaning for Sītā's jewels in terms of her representing auspiciousness throughout, contrasting her with Draupadī in the *Mahābhārata*.

⁹⁴ For Jacobi (1893: 34) this inconsistency was an indication that the account of the burning was absent from the original narrative; cf. also van Daalen (1980: 142).

a later ornate production. So too the description of the golden deer at 3.40 makes considerable use of the more elaborate figures of *svabhāvokti* and *utpreksā*, suggesting that it may well have undergone expansion. This applies even more obviously to the passage where Sītā entertains the disguised Rāvaṇa and rejects his advances, at 3.44–45, with Sītā's closing tirade (3.45.29–45) showing great elaboration of language and imagery, while *sarga* 50, where Rāvaṇa resumes his flight with Sītā, also seems to have been elaborated in the second stage. *Sarga* 53 and the following *sarga* are similar in content to 5.18–20, of which they may be anticipations; the use of many figures of speech and the grammatical irregularities are certainly exceptional. *Sarga* 58 shows clear signs in its language and imagery of being an insertion, by contrast with the simple but dramatic language of the intervening *sargas* 55–57 (on which it expands for artistic motives), and it is lacking from two manuscripts (V1 and B1) and from Gorresio's edition. In the same way, Rāma's ravings at the loss of Sītā in *sarga* 60 are an elaboration on the preceding *sarga* making great use of figures of speech and long compounds. For the same reasons, the final *sarga* 71 of the *Aranyakāṇḍa* seems to be later; there does seem to be a pattern of the beginnings and ends of books having been particularly liable to inflation (the exceptional length of the first *sarga* of the *Kiśkindhākāṇḍa* is another illustration of this).

Within the *Kiśkindhākāṇḍa* Sugrīva's description to Rāma of the Saptajana hermitage (4.13) provides an idyllic interlude between the first and second combats of Vālin and Sugrīva and the ornateness of its language and style suggest that it is a later addition, intended no doubt to relieve the tension.⁹⁵ The two *sargas* where Vālin reproaches Rāma for killing him by stealth and Rāma justifies his action, 4.17–18, again constitute a passage inserted, or at least greatly expanded, in order to provide ethical justification at a period when this was felt necessary; despite the subject matter, there is a high proportion of various figures of speech and Hopkins noted that the metre is very close to the classical form of the *śloka*.⁹⁶ *Sarga* 21, in which Hanumān

⁹⁵ Masson (1975) examines the enmity between Vālin and Sugrīva along Freudian lines, seeing Sugrīva's acceptance that Dundubhi has killed Vālin as the wish-fulfilment one would expect in sibling rivalry. Elsewhere (1981) he looks at Hanumān similarly. Rosalind Lefebvre provides a sensible survey of the issues surrounding the death of Vālin in her translation of the *Kiśkindhākāṇḍa* (*Rāmāyana* 1984: IV, 45–50). Shulman (1979a) compares Kampan's treatment of the slaying of Vālin with that in the Vālmiki *Rāmāyana*.

⁹⁶ Hopkins 1901a: 19. However, P. L. Bhargava (1991–92), accepting that 4.17–

consoles Tārā, is absent from some Northern manuscripts and displaced in others, so its authenticity is dubious simply on textual grounds but in addition it shows unusual linguistic features. The account of Tārā's lament and her grief at Vālin's funeral in 4.23–24 is obviously elaborated stylistically and in fact 4.24.2–12 are omitted in several Northern manuscripts. The extended passages in longer metres in the middle of *sargas* 4.27–30 are a strong indication that they are later elaborations—quite apart from their ornate style and many long compounds—and again parts are absent from many Northern manuscripts (27.14–32 and 29.15–20).

The description of the four search-parties sent out by Sugrīva at 4.39–42 has been the subject of much critical attention over the years. Jacobi concluded that it must be an interpolation and specifically rejected several parts on the grounds of repetition.⁹⁷ Lévi showed that its geographical descriptions are paralleled in the *Hariwamśa* and the *Saddharmaśṛṣṭyupasthāna*.⁹⁸ Lévi regards it as inconceivable that the *Rāmāyaṇa* should borrow from a Buddhist text and as improbable that both derive from a common source in view of the closeness of similarity; accordingly he argues that the passage existed in the *Rāmāyaṇa* before the 2nd century A.D. Mankad points out the similarity of several lines to *Matya Purāṇa* 163, from which he argues that they were taken; however his arguments are inadequate to establish the direction of borrowing and other evidence suggests that the *Matya Purāṇa* was familiar with the *Rāmāyaṇa*.⁹⁹ On the other hand, van Daalen was inclined to accept that there were originally four search parties, although their present form may be different from that original.¹⁰⁰ The repetitiveness and formulaic nature of these *sargas* is striking, as is the similarity of 42.40–41, 43–44 and 933* with Mbh. 13.80.20–26, especially since many of the multi-member compounds in these *sargas* are typical of the *Mahābhārata*. Certainly, all

18 are interpolated, goes on to argue, by a rather doubtful reading of neighbouring passages, that some verses describing a battle between Rāma and Vālin have been lost before 4.16.25 and that only after this happened were these two *sargas* added to justify Rāma's conduct.

⁹⁷ Jacobi 1893: 39 and 1897. F. E. Pargiter (1894) also considered the search party accounts to be a later interpolation.

⁹⁸ Lévi 1918.

⁹⁹ D. R. Mankad, introduction to *Kiśkindhākāṇḍa* and comments in the Critical Notes (*Rāmāyaṇa* 1960–75: vol. IV, pp. XXXV–XLIV and 461), and Mankad 1966; cf. also my comments (Brockington 1984: 113) and those by Lefeber (*Rāmāyaṇa* 1984–; IV, 29–35), also my review of this (Brockington 1995b).

¹⁰⁰ Van Daalen 1980: 148–49.

the evidence points to their being greatly expanded, although there is likely to have been some much briefer passage there earlier, as the beginning of *sarga* 45 indicates, in its transition to Sugrīva's narration of Vālin's fight with Dundubhi and his own exile.¹⁰¹ The entry of the Vānaras into the Rkṣabila at 4.49 has also clearly undergone considerable later expansion on the evidence of its language and style, incorporating a certain amount of *svabhāvokti* and *utprekṣā*.

The whole Niśākara episode at 4.58–62 was already questioned by the commentators Rāmānuja, who notes that some of the manuscripts that he used contained them and some did not, and Govindarāja, who states plainly that they are *prakṣipta*. The manuscripts used for the Critical Edition do support its inclusion in the text (although *sarga* 62 has had a rather chequered manuscript transmission—perhaps significantly it is the final *sarga* of the book in the NE recension), whereas linguistic criteria identify 59–61 as clearly secondary, with the prophecy in *sarga* 61 the most obviously anomalous, being positively Purāṇic in style (as well as alluding to an incident that is narrated at 3 App. I.12.35–38). The last two *sargas* of the passage, 4.59–61, containing the preparations for Hanumān's leap, are as much of a preface to the *Sundarakāṇḍa* and seem to have suffered the inflation observable elsewhere at the beginnings and ends of books, with many elaborate figures of speech, and high proportions of vṛddhied derivatives and long compounds.

The opening *sargas* of the *Sundarakāṇḍa*, 5.1–8, in which Hanumān's leap and his exploration of Lankā are narrated, have undoubtedly been expanded and elaborated on over a long period. Its editor, Jhala, accepts that the Surasā episode in *sarga* 1 is a later addition and notes the *Katāka* commentary's scornful rejection of 1.146–149 as inserted.¹⁰² The great length of half these *sargas* indicates that some of the expansion took place at quite a late stage, while two of them are composed entirely in longer metres (4 and 6, with *sarga* 4 also quite exceptionally rhymed throughout). *Sargas* 12–17 constitute the next major elaborated passage in what is in general a rather ornate book (as its name probably implies), with high proportions of long

¹⁰¹ Incidentally, Alf Hiltebeitel (1979–80) follows a lengthy survey of contemporary South Indian buffalo sacrifice to the goddess with an interpretation of Vālin's slaying of Dundubhi as involving 'evocations of a buffalo sacrifice', with particular reference to Mataṅga and Śabari.

¹⁰² G. C. Jhala, introduction to *Sundarakāṇḍa* and Critical Notes (*Rāmāyana* 1960–75: vol. V, pp. XXXII–XXXIII and 477).

compounds and similes in all of them, as well as various other unusual features; Jacobi drew attention to the large number of similes in *sarga* 17 and Bulcke has suggested that *sarga* 14 is a later interpolation.¹⁰³ 5.26–27 are again entirely in longer metres and show high proportions of long compounds and of similes—obvious signs of expansion in the second stage of growth. 5.33–37, which narrate Hanumān’s conversation with Sītā have undergone considerable expansion, some of which is still detectable on manuscript evidence: 32.5–12 are omitted by most NE manuscripts and *sarga* 37 by all NE manuscripts except N1, while there is extensive repetition between *sargas* 37 and 54–66 (also between 36.22–26 and 65.7–12). By contrast with these unusually long *sargas*, 5.43, in which Hanumān kills the sons of Rāvaṇa’s ministers, is exceptionally short, which suggest that its insertion, presumably in order to enhance Hanumān’s prestige, came after the shape of the surrounding *sargas* was already fixed. The same kind of considerations no doubt apply to the elaboration of 5.45–47, which contain high proportions of long compounds and of similes, while *sarga* 45 is entirely in *vamśastha*, with longer verses interspersed throughout 46. There has also been much expansion and insertion in 5.54–58, in which Hanumān meets Sītā again, returns across the sea and tells his companions about his experiences; *sarga* 56 anticipates 65–66, in which Hanumān narrates his experience and Sītā’s message to Rāma, at great length before the same material is presented more briefly (and in a presumably older form) in *sarga* 57, although *sarga* 57, along with 54–55, has a high proportion of long compounds.

In the *Yuddhakāṇḍa* some of the most obvious expansions have occurred in the descriptions of combat but various other *sargas* have also been inflated. *Sargas* 4–5, narrating the muster of the Vānara army and Rāma’s despondency, suggest this by their elaborate use of figures of speech and the inclusion of formulæ drawn from the *Mahābhārata* stock. Sītā’s lament and her consoling by Saramā at 6.23–24 anticipate her lament and consolation by Trijatā in *sarga* 38 (as often, the first occurring of such doublets seems the later) and stylistic indications confirm their lateness, whereas there is no linguistic or stylistic evidence to confirm Bulcke’s suggestion that the preceding *sarga* 22 (the episode of the illusory head of Rāma) is a later anticipation of the illusory death of Sītā in *sarga* 68.¹⁰⁴ The descriptions of

¹⁰³ Jacobi 1893: 120, and Bulcke 1952.

¹⁰⁴ Bulcke 1950: 142–44.

the city of Laṅkā and of the start of the siege at 6.30–31 are highly ornate, while *sarga* 31 is also very long. Within the battle scenes, the *sargas* that seem to have undergone the greatest elaboration in terms of language and style, and in some instances metre, are 46–48, 53, 55, 57–63, 70–73, 79–81, 87 and 90–91, although one of these does not contain descriptions of fighting, for *sarga* 70 contains Lakṣmaṇa’s tirade on the inefficacy of *dharma* (and some of its proverbial matter at 70.31–2, 34 and 37–38 is paralleled in Mbh. 12.8.16 and 18–21). Several of these are attested neither in the *Bālakāṇḍa* summaries nor in the *Rāmopākhyāna*, even though their subject matter leads to an expectation of mention in these texts. Subsequently, 6.102–4, containing the preliminaries to the fire-ordeal and the ordeal itself, reveal their lateness more by their subject matter and vocabulary than by their style; their status has been questioned by several scholars.¹⁰⁵ The next three *sargas*, 105–107 (in which Rāma’s divinity and identity with Viṣṇu are revealed to him, Sītā is restored and Daśaratha appears from heaven) possess obvious stylistic features indicating their lateness, quite apart from their subject matter. Finally, the last few *sargas* of the book, 6.111–116, which would once have been the end of the whole epic, have clearly undergone considerable expansion, with the last two *sargas* becoming exceptionally long; on the other hand, some of the material is presumably quite old and, for example, Telang regarded the occurrence of the proverb *eti jīvantam ānando naram varṣaśatād api* at 6.114.2cd as earlier than its appearance in Patañjali.¹⁰⁶ The popularity of some of this material, which would have been one reason for its expansion, is well shown in the way that the concluding passage on Rāma’s righteous rule is reproduced extensively in the *Mahābhārata* tradition (as is shown in detail in the first section of chapter ten).

The *Uttarakāṇḍa*, like the *Bālakāṇḍa* with which it forms the third stage of growth of the epic, is by no means homogeneous. As with the *Bālakāṇḍa* too, there have been arguments both for and against its authenticity as part of the original *Rāmāyana*; for example, M. V. Kibe asserts that the *Uttarakāṇḍa* is a necessary part of the *Rāmāyana*, basically on grounds of piety, and Dileep Kumar Kanjilal stresses the citations in the *Mahābhārata*, whereas Chatterjee regards

¹⁰⁵ In particular, Nilmadhav Sen (1952a), but cf. also G. H. Bhatt (1955–56), and van Daalen 1980: 190–91.

¹⁰⁶ Telang 1874a and 1874b.

its developed religious and social pattern as evidence for its lateness, though still considering it pre-Buddhist.¹⁰⁷ The most obvious stylistic difference is between Agastya's narrative in *sargas* 1–36 and the remaining *sargas* 37–100. The difference in total length is actually the reverse of that which the number of *sargas* might suggest, since the average length of *sargas* 1–36 is nearly double that of the other *sargas* and so their total length slightly exceeds that of *sargas* 37–100. The style of 7.1–36 is relatively ornate, with a fairly high proportion of similes and long compounds, and it contains more tag verses in longer metres (though still a lower proportion than in the core books); the general impression that it gives stylistically is not greatly dissimilar from the elaborated passages of the second stage that have just been surveyed. All except the last two *sargas* of the passage consist of Agastya's narration of the previous exploits of Rāvaṇa and his ancestors (for which reason Jacobi named it 'die Rāvaneis') and material corresponding to this is found in the *Rāmopākhyāna*, the oldest reworking of *Rāmāyaṇa* material (also dealt with more fully in the first section of chapter ten). Antoine has suggested that this account of Rāvaṇa by Agastya (7.1–34) and the account of Viśvāmitra by Śatānanda in the *Bālakānda* (1.50–64) 'might well have been independent epic songs',¹⁰⁸ so far as Rāvaṇa's exploits are concerned this has some plausibility. The last two *sargas* of Agastya's narrative contain the story of Hanumān's birth and childhood and show much the same degree of stylistic elaboration, although no doubt of independent origin; Vekerdi regards this version of the Hanumān story as essentially the same as that in 4.65 (which he regards as 'spurious' and which was noted above as belonging to the second stage of growth).¹⁰⁹

Apart from Agastya's narrative, however, the *Uttarakānda* appears on the whole later than the *Bālakānda*; there is much less divergence between the recensions and its view of Rāma as divine is more advanced than anywhere else in the epic. Nonetheless, Kālidāsa seems to allude to certain events from it and so it presumably is earlier than the 4th century A.D. (and so earlier than Kirfel's dating of the *Bālakānda*); indeed, Shah used the evidence of the *Raghuvamśa* in

¹⁰⁷ Kibe 1941, Kanjilal 1992, and A. K. Chatterjee 1972–73; cf. also the attempt by Ramashraya Sharma to find allusions to the *Uttarakānda* in earlier books, referred to in n. 70.

¹⁰⁸ Antoine 1975: 46–54.

¹⁰⁹ Vekerdi 1964.

support of his exclusion of App. 9 from the text (the passage describes the return journey of Satrughna to Ayodhyā fourteen years after the killing of Lavaṇa).¹¹⁰ On the other hand, Sukumar Sen suggests that, although Kālidāsa did know the story of the *Uttarakāṇḍa* (since he dealt with it in *Raghuvamśa* 14–15), he ‘appears to have known it as a separate myth appended to the Rāma story as a sequel’ and that in fact much of the *Uttarakāṇḍa* is based on Kālidāsa’s treatment of the theme.¹¹¹ Again, Gail uses sculptural evidence from the Kailāsa temple at Elūra (mid 8th century) to reinforce a late dating for both the *Bāla* and *Uttara kāṇḍas*, since no scenes from them are represented among the friezes sculpted on it.¹¹²

The *Uttarakāṇḍa* originated basically as a response to the natural curiosity felt by the audience to hear about the later events in Rāma’s life too, following his installation in Ayodhyā. Superficial hints of Rāma’s exceptional status now became the basic theme of the *Uttarakāṇḍa*, in which the final stage was reached in the progress of Rāma from a heroic figure to an ideal model of the perfect ruler and finally to the *avatāra* of the supreme deity. More generally, the latter part of the *Uttarakāṇḍa* can be seen as an attempt to fill out some of the questions left unanswered at the end of the *Yuddhakāṇḍa*; more specifically, it can be seen as the realisation of the prediction made there by Maheśvara that Rāma, after taking charge of the kingdom again, will establish the Ikṣvāku dynasty, celebrate an *asvamedha* and, after gaining unparalleled fame, deservedly go to heaven (6.107.1–6). With one exception (7.41, where the description of Rāma and Sītā in the pleasure-garden positively demands some stylishness), the style is plain and unadorned, and there is no real difference between the narration of obviously Purāṇic episodes, such as the stories of Śveta and Daṇḍa (7.68–72) or of Ila (7.78–81),¹¹³ and episodes that are central to its plot, such as the banishment of Sītā (7.42–47).

¹¹⁰ For Shah’s arguments for excluding this passage and App. 13 (Rāma’s threats to Earth after Sītā’s disappearance and his consoling by Brahmā and the other gods), both of which have full manuscript support, see his Introduction to the *Uttarakāṇḍa* (*Rāmāyana* 1960–75: VII, 26–29), and for a challenge to his decision see Narasimha Moorty 1995.

¹¹¹ Sukumar Sen 1977: 6–10. Gautam Patel (1994) has even argued specifically that the abandonment of Sītā is not attested in the *Rāmopākhyāna* nor in Bhāsa’s plays but was first created by Kālidāsa, after which it was incorporated in the *Uttarakāṇḍa*.

¹¹² Gail 1985.

¹¹³ Ariel Glucklich (1988–89) examines the story of Daṇḍa at 7.70–72.

Karve links Sītā's second ordeal, narrated at 7.88, to the birth of the twins and popular beliefs that twins imply adultery, citing Mbh. 1.115.21–24 (Kunti's comments on Mādrī's twins) and also a Marāthī parallel.¹¹⁴ Vekerdi suggests that Laksmaṇa's banishment for disturbing Rāma's discourse with Kāla (7.95) is a borrowing from the story of Arjuna's exile for disturbing Yudhiṣṭhīra in the bedchamber.¹¹⁵

The mechanisms by which the third stage came to be added are probably similar to those that saw the major expansion of the *Mahābhārata*. This process of transformation seems in the case of both epics to be linked with passing from the hands of their traditional reciters, the *sūtas* and *kuśilavas*, into those of the brāhmans as the guardians of all traditional learning. The group of formulæ whose distribution in both epics is relatively late provides good evidence of the changed interests of the later parts of both epics, since, although a few more general formulæ first appear now and even one battle formula, the majority have a broadly religious significance. Of these a number are specifically Vaiṣṇava but there are several which reflect general religious, ethical or cosmological concerns, while links with the Purāṇas are becoming more obvious. By this period the two traditions had evidently merged and probably this, like the shift in interests, was a result of their transmission passing from the *sūtas* and other bards to the brāhmans. Within the *Rāmāyaṇa* tradition, the process of contact with the *Mahābhārata* seems to be particularly linked with the Northern recension.

Sukthankar's seminal article has elucidated the role of the Bhārgavas in the amplification of the *Mahābhārata* and in particular its brahmanisation. The *Rāmāyaṇa* clearly underwent a parallel process of adaptation to brāhmaṇ values, possibly under the influence of these same Bhārgavas, although the evidence is much slighter. Shende first studied the occurrences of the Bhṛgus and Āṅgirases in the *Rāmāyaṇa* and concluded that 'When the Bhṛgvāṅgirases attempted to transform the Bhārata into the Mahābhārata, they must have also handled the Rāmāyaṇa of Vālmīki and absorbed it in the Mahābhārata in the form of its condensed summary (the Rāmopākhyāna).'¹¹⁶ Goldman notes that the *Rāmāyaṇa* twice identifies Vālmīki as a Bhārgava but only in the *Uttarakāṇḍa*—once by implication at 7.84.16 and once at

¹¹⁴ Karve 1947.

¹¹⁵ Vekerdi 1964: 192–93.

¹¹⁶ Shende 1943b, cf. Shende 1943a and 1947.

7.1328* 2—and comes to the conclusion that the *Uttarakāṇḍa* is later than the *Bālakāṇḍa* but earlier than Aśvaghoṣa (who puts Vālmīki and Cyavana in the same family, *Buddhacarita* 1.43) and that ‘if at all, Bhṛguisation affected only the last two *kāṇḍas* of the Rāmāyaṇa’.¹¹⁷ The insertion of didactic, ethical, philosophical and political material, which was perhaps intended to give the *Rāmāyaṇa* too an encyclopaedic dimension, took place to a much more limited extent than with the *Mahābhārata*.

The shift from oral to written transmission of the *Rāmāyaṇa* is probably related to this shift in transmission from bard to brāhmaṇa and thus probably occurred between the second and third stages (but need not have happened all at once—despite the usual but unproven assumption that the writing down of an oral text occurs once only—any more than the cut-off between those stages is an absolutely sharp one) although as yet there is insufficient data to establish this conclusively. It is perhaps significant that the third stage displays a certain self-consciousness about the oral nature of the epic, since the *Bālakāṇḍa* contains both the story of Nārada telling Vālmīki about Rāma (1.6–2.41), with its suggestion of Vālmīki himself as a bard (partly however contradicted by the emphasis on his having recourse to meditation to learn more of the story in *sarga* 3), and the narration of Vālmīki’s composition by Kuśa and Lava (*sarga* 4), with its stress on recitation, while the *Uttarakāṇḍa* recounts Vālmīki’s sending of Kuśa and Lava to recite the *Rāmāyaṇa* for the first time at Rāma’s court (7.84–5) in a curious blending of old and new, recitation and first performance. Itinerant ballad-singers (*kuśilava*, supposedly derived from the names of Kuśa and Lava) did later play a role in the dissemination of the epics among the population at large.

By contrast, the expansion of the core in the second stage was no doubt owed to the bards who recited it from memory, responding to the expectations of their audience, embellishing and augmenting the original story through the addition of episodes, descriptive digressions and geographical details. Consequently, while there are some changes in the relative frequency of formulaic personal epithets, there is no large-scale replacement of one set of formulæ by another, such as can be seen occurring between the second and third stages, and again

¹¹⁷ Goldman 1976. Vālmīki is also termed a Bhārgava at *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* 3.3.18 but elsewhere in the *Rāmāyaṇa* he is called by the different patronymic Prācetasa (also, for example, at *Raghuvamśa* 15.63 and *Uttararāmacarita* 7.14).

in the fourth stage. By the third stage the originally separate traditions of the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa* are coalescing, with the attendant effects on their formulaic diction, and even in some instances the likelihood that the borrowing has been from a written text of the other epic, so specific are the details.

While it is likely that Vālmīki based his poem on pre-existing oral materials, there is no reason to suppose that he utilised everything available and every reason to suppose that other ballads continued to circulate at least for a considerable period, in some cases perhaps to be absorbed later into the Vālmīki *Rāmāyaṇa*. On the other hand, it seems unlikely that Madhva's listing in the first *adhyāya* of his *Mahābhāratatātparyanirṇaya* among the sources for his own teachings of the *Mūla-Rāmāyaṇa*, whereas in *adhyāyas* 3–9 and 10 he indicates the *Mahā-Rāmāyaṇa* as the source of his epitome of the Rāma epic, establishes the co-existence of two different stages of the *Rāmāyaṇa* quite distinct from each other, as S. N. Tadpatrikar believed.¹¹⁸ It is even more doubtful whether any of the Buddhist *Jātaka* material derives from these other ballads rather than from Vālmīki, as noted above. However, some elements of the vernacular *Rāmāyaṇas* could do so, although it seems on the whole more likely that they derive from other folk material or result from the transformation that the story undergoes through its absorption into popular or folk Hinduism.

The *Rāmāyaṇa* certainly continued to absorb material from varied sources, as is shown by the material relegated in the Critical Edition to its * passages and Appendix I, which forms the fourth and fifth stages of growth of the epic. These illustrate particularly clearly the divergence into recensions which has been an obvious feature of the history of the text, as well as showing the two opposing trends seen in material of the second stage of on the one hand elaboration on the more dramatic and lyrical aspects of the story and on the other narration in a plain and broadly Purānic style of various extraneous episodes. The most significant differences of style, however, are those between the recensions. The Northern recension presents on the whole a more polished version than the Southern, with relatively little difference between the Northwestern and Northeastern recensions. Where differences are ascertainable, the Northern recension generally avoids irregular forms and hiatus to a greater extent, it shows a verbal

¹¹⁸ Tadpatrikar 1923–24. It seems much more probable that Madhva has simply used different terminology in different parts of the work.

pattern more like that of classical Sanskrit literature, it contains higher proportions of various figures of speech and of long compounds, and it has fewer examples of naïve features such as playing on personal names and parallelism of structure. It is interesting, however, to note that similes often remain as the only similarity between the divergent readings of the two main recensions, which is linked to the stereotyped nature of many similes.

The continued growth of the text over so long a period means inevitably that it was composed against the background of changing political, social and cultural patterns, as well as the development in the understanding of the nature of its hero, Rāma, which are among the topics surveyed in the next two chapters.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE *RĀMĀYANA* (2)

Examination of the general setting of the *Rāmāyana* within the background, both natural and manmade, which is depicted can reveal much about the culture presupposed by the successive poets and redactors. In general, they tend to describe the features that they are familiar with and so, unless they are strongly influenced by an older treatment of the subject, it is normally the features of their own time that appear in their descriptions and incidental allusions. Indeed, it is often the incidental allusions that are the most revealing in this respect. On the other hand, as was pointed out earlier for the *Mahābhārata*, the interests of the poets are not necessarily those of the rest of society, except to the extent that they are responsive to their audience, so the picture is not likely to be a complete one.

Archaeology and the epic

As with the *Mahābhārata*, Indian archaeologists have attempted to link the *Rāmāyana* with the archaeological record of early India. B. B. Lal, who connects the Painted Grey Ware with the Aryans of the *Mahābhārata*, first linked the *Rāmāyana* with late Painted Grey Ware, Ochre Coloured Ware and the Copper Hoards and, in a later article, with the early phase of Northern Black Polished Ware (end of 8th to beginning of 7th century B.C.).¹ Lal excavated at the sites which he identified as being Ayodhyā, Nandigrāma, Śringaverapura and Bhāradvaja's *āśrama*; this formed part of the national project, 'Archaeology of the Rāmāyana Sites' headed by Lal and K. N. Diksit. The earliest levels excavated at Ayodhyā, in fourteen different areas, yielded the early N. B. P. Ware along with iron weapons, as did those at Nandigrāma, although earlier material was found at Śringaverapura (but permanent habitation begins at the same period as at the other

¹ Lal 1973 and 1981.

sites), while Lal considers that Bhāradvāja's *āśrama* was deserted around the 7th century B.C., though reoccupied during the 4th–5th centuries A.D. Lal therefore regards the events of the *Rāmāyaṇa* as being set at the beginning of the 7th century B.C.

Even less plausibly, Krishna Kumar has claimed more recently that 'the OCP and the associated Gangetic Copper Hoards represent the late R̄gvedic Aryan culture', that this 'represents the Rāmāyaṇa Age Culture, and the antennae weapons discovered at different sites in the Indian peninsula mark the footprints of lord Rāma, who as the leader of the Late R̄gvedic Aryans pioneered the task of Aryanisation of the Deccan plateau and Śrī Laṅkā' and thus that 'The Rāmāyaṇa events occurred sometime in the 15th century B.C.'² By contrast, M.C. Joshi questions the possibility of identifying Ayodhyā with the modern town of the same name, adducing the description of a 'mythical city' called Ayodhyā in the *Taittirīya Āranyaka*.³ Not surprisingly, B. B. Lal argues against him, by drawing evidence from passages quoted from the *Atharvaveda* that the term *ayodhyā* in the *Taittirīya Āranyaka* should be understood not as a name but as an adjective referring to the metaphorical city of the human body.⁴ Romila Thapar, despite her reasonably expressed doubts about linking the events of the epics to the archaeological record, has also offered the suggestion that, since the Rākṣasas are concentrated in the Vindhya range, they may perhaps be identified with the Chalcolithic cultures and the Black-and-Red Ware of the 2nd and early 1st millennium B.C. She also speculates that the descriptions of the wealth of Laṅkā might be 'a vague folk memory of the rich cities of the Bronze Age past'.⁵

H. D. Sankalia has published a series of studies concerning the bearing of archaeology on the *Rāmāyaṇa*.⁶ He concludes in general

² Kumar 1991–92 and 1994. Others, not tied even to this extent by the archaeological record, have been even more fanciful; for example, S. B. Roy (1982) has put forward the hypothesis that the earliest layer of the Rāma story belongs to the period 2000–1700 B.C., that Rāvaṇa's Laṅkā was Mohenjodaro and that Rāma was an Indo-Aryan god.

³ Joshi 1975–76.

⁴ Lal 1978–79; cf. also Joshi's rejoinder (1979–80).

⁵ Thapar 1978: 19–20.

⁶ Sankalia 1973a, 1977–78, 1978a, 1978b, 1980–81 and 1982. His 1982 book in fact covers much of the same ground as his 1973a book, though at greater length. It is surprising to read from a major archaeologist the apparently serious claim that 'the *Pushpaka* could have been the first jumbo jet' (1982: 105).

that the picture of life given in the text is true of North India between the 1st–2nd centuries B.C. and the 5th century A.D. and suggests that it goes back to the early Iron Age, as shown by the references to *kālāyasa*, *kārṣṇāyasa* and *ayasa*. His view is that Ayodhyā developed as a city at the time of Puṣyamitra and only reached the state described in the text under the early Guptas. He suggests that descriptions of various luxuries and especially the use of wine probably originated at the time of the flourishing trade with Rome and other Western countries (including the suggestion that Sītā's offering to the Kālindī of 100 pots of wine at 2.1173* is linked with the import of amphoræ of Roman wine), while he also regards Rāma's token for Sītā as a signet-ring and argues that such rings first appear under the Indo-Greeks; he also suggests identifying Marīcipattana in the search party accounts with Muziris of the classical geographers. However, his other suggestions of Greek or Roman influence have less substance. Thus, although the events narrated might be placed around 1000 B.C. (or more generally between 1500 and 700 B.C.), the *Rāmāyana* in its present form must belong between the 3rd century B.C. and the 4th century A.D., with some portions later still. He also locates the Rākṣasas and Vānaras on the Chota Nagpur plateau (emphasising the use by the Vānaras of *sāla* trees as weapons) and places Laṅkā in the Vindhya range, while accepting that we have no archaeological evidence about the identity of the rulers of these areas. Although Sankalia tends to generalise his evidence for dating from the specific passage involved to larger units of the epic than is warranted, and in general shows a naïve approach to textual matters, many of the individual points that he makes are significant and will be taken up in subsequent sections of this chapter.

Political and military aspects

Throughout the *Rāmāyana* the natural focus of society is the ruler surrounded by his courtiers; the view which sees the *Ayodhyākānda* as central to the epic is largely a reflection of this. The centrality of the ruler to orderly society is shown clearly in the two pictures of ideal society with which in effect the epic opens and closes, for the opening *sargas* of the *Bālakānda* include an idyllic picture of life under Daśaratha's benign rule while the *Yuddhakānda* reaches its conclusion in the description of Rāma's righteous rule, when both nature and

society run smoothly and nothing untoward happens. Although both these passages are late, the basic attitude is found at all stages.

The regular term for the ruler is *rājan*, which may denote anything from a tribal chieftain to an absolute monarch. Other fairly frequent terms are *mahārāja*, *pārthiva*, *mahiṣpati* and *nṛpa*, but the more elaborate titles of later Indian history and the technical terms of the *arthaśāstra* are almost completely absent.⁷ Indeed, there seems to be visible in the text a gradual development from, in the first stage, a ruler granted respect and affection by a people with whom he is in close contact, through claims to divine status first made in the second stage (for example in Rāma's justification of himself to Vālin at 4.17–18), to hyperbolic statements about the king's absolute power in the fourth stage. Nonetheless, exigencies of the plot mean that Daśaratha banishes Rāma arbitrarily and against the wishes of the people, while in the third stage Rāma is represented as eager to learn public opinion and prepared to banish Sītā in consequence. Thapar has examined three different versions of the Rāma story (the Buddhist *Jātaka* versions, the Vālmīki *Rāmāyana* and the Jain *Pāumacariya*) to establish how far the story is 'a charter of validation for the monarchical state' and over this longer time scale sees them as reflecting the evolution of the state from tribal oligarchies and chiefships to monarchies.⁸

The king's power, however, is matched by his obligations to his subjects, as is made clear in relation to his right to levy taxes. Though to quite an extent proverbial in nature, the three brief passages on this topic from different stages (2.69.18, 3.5.10–13 and 7.1112*–1114*) all assert that the king who takes his sixth share as tribute and fails to protect his subjects commits a sin. In particular, the ascetics appeal to Rāma for protection against the Rākṣasas on this basis in the second of these passages. Later, the king's punitive role is given greater prominence; for example, the third stage contains the myth about king Daṇḍa being told by Manu to use *danda*, 'punishment' (7.70.8–10). But no clearly articulated theory of kingship is ever presented (still less anything corresponding to the *Rājadharma-parvan* of the *Mahābhārata*). The nearest approach to anything like this is in the fourth stage when Agastya narrates to Rāma how in the Kṛtayuga people begged Brahmā to give them a king and he agreed, endowing him

⁷ The only limited exceptions are *sārvabhauma* at 2.82.16a and *cakravartin* at 5.29.2, also *saṃrāj* at 2.195* 1.

⁸ Thapar 1982.

with the attributes of the *lokapālas* (7 App. 12). Nonetheless, the implicit attitude throughout is that monarchy is the proper form of government and this is at times made explicit, as in the second-stage dirge on the evils of a kingless state (2.61, paralleled in Mbh. 12.67–68), which include natural disasters such as an absence of rain.

It is generally accepted that the king's oldest son will succeed him on the throne but this is not automatic, to judge by the varying declarations in the opening *sargas* of the *Ayodhyākānda*, which may however reflect the requirements of the plot as much as the regular practice at the time (as is clearly the case with Bharata's references to the practice at 2.73.7 and 95.2 and Vasiṣṭha's at 2.102.30–31). Indeed, the concept of the *yuvrājā* who becomes a partner in kingship with the previous incumbent in itself suggests that positive steps had to be taken to ensure the intended succession; it is also more prominent than in the *Mahābhārata*. In addition, at the beginning of 2.61, it does seem to be the case that the group of named brāhmans designated *rājakartārah*, 'king-makers', do genuinely have some choice over whom they elect as Daśaratha's successor. In general, however, the emphasis on the hereditary principle is less than might be expected. The term *pitrpaitāmaha* is not common and refers as often to inherited possessions, while the commoner term *rājaputra* is an equivalent of 'prince' or 'princess', applied in most of its occurrences to Rāma and his brothers or to Sītā.

The basic terms of political theory do appear from time to time but, in contrast to the later *Mahābhārata*, there are no extended treatments of the topic, although there are a few passages where individual characters say a little. For example, Hanumān proclaims the importance of friends or allies, *mitra*, when reminding Sugrīva of his duty to help Rāma, but does not go beyond general principles (4.28.9–12). In this context, Rāma refers to kings eager for conquest (*jigīṣu*, 4.29.30b; *vijigīṣu* is used of Rāma at 6.9.10b) and subsequently Hanumān goes through the four *upāyas* and names them (5.39.2–3), while there are various other incidental references to these *upāyas*. However, as Oscar Botto has noted, the sixfold policy typical of the *Kauṭilya Arthaśāstra* is not mentioned before the fourth stage (2.2165* 3 and 7 App. 8.348), although the term *arthaśāstra* does occur three times in the text (2.94.9b, 3.41.32c and 6.51.15a+c) and several times in the fourth stage.⁹ Equally, though, the term *dharmaśāstra* is mentioned

⁹ Botto 1972: 47.

(2.94.33a) and on the whole the views of the *Rāmāyaṇa* poets are nearer to that tradition at all stages and especially in the fourth stage.

Although Daśaratha's court is the centre of the action in the first half of the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa*, no very detailed description is given of the way that it functions. Few details are given of other courts, those of Guha, Sugrīva or Rāvaṇa, and those details that are given are indistinguishable from the Ayodhyā court. It is clear that just one model of courtly life is present to the poets' minds. Ayodhyā is described, though rarely, as the king's seat or capital, *rājadhānī*, and the term is also applied once each to Rāvaṇa's city and Yama's and Indra's abodes. There are several terms for assemblies (*sabhā*, *pariṣad*, *samsad*, *samiti*) which seem to be used interchangeably, and their membership is not fixed; in fact, the commonest term *sabhā* denotes the assembly-hall as much as the assembly. It is likely to be some kind of advisory council rather than the 'Popular or Representative Assembly' suggested by P. C. Dharma.¹⁰ There is also very little evidence within the text about the administration of justice, though rather more in the fourth stage, mainly in 7 App. 8, in which Rāma summons and then enters his *sabhā*, here obviously a judicial body, along with his *purohita*, learned brāhmaṇas, lawyers (*dharma-pāṭhaka*, 309 and 426) and so on, in order to hear plaintiffs; the main purpose of the passages is the inclusion of several *ākhyānas*, one of which is that of king Nṛga, emphasising the need for the king to be accessible to litigants (13–82). The meagre information on the king's treasury will be presented in the next section on economic activity and material culture.

The most prominent court officials are the *sacivas*, *mantrins* and *amātyas*, to judge by the frequency of their mention, but the terms are most probably synonymous in the *Rāmāyaṇa* as well as in the *Mahābhārata*, at least in the earlier stages, although by the third stage *mantrin* is ousting the others. On the other hand, the *sūta* is mentioned more often in the earlier stages and less often in the third, while Dásaratha's *sūta*, Sumantra, is evidently one of the major officials at court and illustrates well the roles of the ancient *sūta* as confidant, eulogist and charioteer.¹¹ The next most frequently mentioned official is the *dūta*, the messenger or envoy, sent on various errands but enjoying a definite status and a degree of inviolability. The *purohita* is

¹⁰ Dharma 1941: 35–36.

¹¹ W. Ruben emphasises the *sūta*'s role as friend and adviser of the king as well as eulogist (1936: 253–62).

distinguished from the *mantrins* and Daśaratha's *purohita*, Vasiṣṭha, is prominent in the arrangements for Rāma's installation and following Daśaratha's death but does not otherwise play a major role outside these ritually significant occasions; he certainly does not have the role of special adviser. The general, *senāpati* (rarely *vāhinīpati* or *camūpati*) is not very frequently mentioned, though a little more frequent in earlier than in later stages; he is superior to the *balādhyakṣa*, the only other term specifically denoting a rank, which is almost exclusively found in the first stage and seems to denote the next most senior rank. Some late passages suggest that the proper number of officials was eight (2.61.2–3, also 1.7.1–2). Only the very late *kaccit sarga* envisages a higher number—fifteen in one's own kingdom and eighteen in others (2.94.30 = Mbh. 2.5.27, significantly using a term for ministers, *tīrtha*, not found elsewhere in the text and using the figure eighteen typical of the *Mahābhārata*)—but even so it does not name them (a deficiency remedied by D1.3 in 2149*, which provides a list of names not otherwise attested in either epic).

The generally heroic nature of the epic means that terms for warfare, armies and weapons occur commonly and widely, although naturally there is a particular concentration in the *Yuddhakāṇḍa*, with a subsidiary one at the start of the period of exile, in the first half of the *Aranyakāṇḍa*. In general the first stage shows the highest frequency of such terms and the third stage the lowest, but such terms tend to occur more often in early passages of the *Ayodhyā* to *Sundara kāṇḍas* and in late passages of the *Yuddhakāṇḍa*, no doubt because the elaborated parts of the *Ayodhyā* to *Sundara kāṇḍas* are not usually battle scenes, whereas they are in the *Yuddhakāṇḍa*. However, there are noteworthy variations within this overall pattern both for individual terms and more significantly for different types of weapon, although terms for battle and combat (the commonest are *yuddha*, *rāja* and *samara* in that order) conform closely to the average distribution. The most frequent term for an army is *sainya*, which is more than twice as common as the simple form *senā* but is most frequent in the second stage, whereas *senā* is typical of the first stage; less frequent terms are *camū*, *vāhinī* and *anika*, while *aksauhiṇī* is very rare (twice in the second stage, five times in the third, once in the fourth), whereas it is not uncommon in the *Mahābhārata*. Occasionally armies are described as having four limbs or the separate groupings of elephants, horses and chariots are mentioned; in the fourth stage, one passage

gives a classification into allied, tribal, standing, mercenary and enemy forces (*mitra*, *atavī*, *maula*, *bhrtya*, *dviṣat*, 6.177* 11–12), which may be compared both with the late *Mahābhārata* (15.12.7–8) and the *Kautilīya Arthaśāstra* (9.2.1). Two other general terms, *daṇḍa* and *bala*, may sometimes denote armies, which are also, though rarely and mostly in the first stage, identified by their standards or flags as *dhvajinī*. Individual heroes have their own devices on their banners: Śambara has a whale (2.9.10d), Bharata a *kovidāra* tree (2.78.3b), Prahasta a snake (6.45.26a), Indrajit a lion (6.47.15a[l.v.]) and Rāvaṇa a human head (6.88.14c), as well as Śiva's bull on his banner (1.35.15b, 6.82.34c and 105.2b). Battle-formations are scarcely mentioned, in contrast to the *Mahābhārata*; however, there is one mention of Rāma adopting the Garuḍa *vyūha* (6.21.12a), as well as two more general references to the drawing up of battle-formations in the second stage, but no details of their exact form.

Ordinary soldiers are little mentioned and indeed the foot-soldier, *padāti* or *pādāta*, is referred to little more than twenty times, whereas the chariot-warrior, *mahāratha* (rarely *atiratha* or *rathin*), is fairly frequent. Substantives formed from *vyudh* are found occasionally as terms for soldiers but the two other general terms are very rare and late.¹² In the accounts of the battles the ordinary soldiers are almost completely ignored, apart from a few references to the Vānaras and Rākṣasas attacking each other indiscriminately. By contrast, the form of combat usually depicted is the duel (*dvandvayuddha*) fought between two warriors mounted on chariots and a specific term for a chariot-duel occurs in the context of Rāma's last combat with Rāvaṇa (*dvairatha* at 6.90.13b, 94.13c and 95.1c only; the term is not uncommon in the *Mahābhārata*, occurring 21 times in *parvans* 6–9). Terms for chariots, horses and related items in fact form the third largest category of military terms after those for arrows and for battles; their distribution is close to the average but with rather fewer in the third stage, which agrees with the well-known decline in the importance of chariots compared with elephants for warfare.¹³ The chariot was usually, no doubt, drawn by a pair of horses but there are a few explicit references to four horses, both in battle and for peaceful purposes, while rarely

¹² Indeed, *bhata* occurs only once in the text (at 3.8.14d, significantly in Sītā's attempt to dissuade Rāma from killing the Rākṣasas), while *sainika* is found just five times in the text but more often in the fourth and fifth stages.

¹³ Cf. Hopkins 1889a: 266–67. Singh (1965: 35–36) suggests that this change is already visible in the Pali canon and that the epics therefore show an older pattern.

eight horses are mentioned or once a purely fanciful thousand (6.59.11). Its various parts are rarely mentioned outside occasional lists (such as at 6.45.24–26 and 90.5–7), the commonest being the felly, the axle and the wheel itself. But the poets of the *Rāmāyana* at any stage were little interested in the mechanics of the chariot's action or construction, compared with the exploits of the warriors fighting from them. Even the various types of manœuvres that the charioteer could perform are rarely mentioned.¹⁴ The same concentration on the warrior's exploits at the expense of the mundane details is probably responsible for the paucity of mention of protective armour, found less than a hundred times in the entire text; it is significant, however, that over half the occurrences are in the first stage, which thus shows somewhat greater realism than later stages.

Terms for arrows provide nearly a third of all mentions of weapons and make up more than half the total when bows and quivers are included. By comparison with other weapons, arrows (most commonly *śara*, *bāṇa* or *sāyaka* in order of frequency, also *iṣu*, *nārāca*, *mārgana*, and rarely *bhalla*, *ardhacandra*, *viśikha*, *patatri*, *aīśka*, *karmīn*, *vikarmīn*, *nālīka*, *pṛsatka*) are much more frequent in the first stage than in the third, but bows (normally *dhanus* but also *cāpa*, *kārmuka* and *śarāsana*) and quivers (*tūṇī*, rarely *kalāpa*, *iṣudhī*, *tūṇīra*, *śarāvara*) show more nearly the average distribution for military terms, so the shift away from archery is not as marked as terms just for arrows might suggest. The greater realism of the first stage is probably again the reason for this, since the arrow is often referred to in its flight and reaching its target. The number of terms for arrows and their parts (*kankapatra*, *kaikavāśas*, *punkha*) is extremely large, which further illustrates their centrality to the early epic.¹⁵ However, the type of bow is not anywhere explicitly stated, although the great majority of the evidence is in favour of a long bow held vertically, with the string drawn back to the face, and specifically the ear, for aim and release.

The next most frequent category of weapons, but less than a fifth as frequently mentioned as bows and arrows, is that of spears, javelins

¹⁴ The main instance is at 6.96.3 and Hopkins (1889a: 253) noted only this one from the *Rāmāyana* and called it 'a doubtful passage'.

¹⁵ In addition to the terms already noted, the following terms for arrows occurs once in the text: *aījalika* (6.35.23b), *ardhanārāca* (6.35.23a), *ksurāpra* (6.57.57a, also v.l. at 5.44.33a) *vatsadanta* (6.35.23c) and *śitimukha* (3.49.9d, also v.l. at 3.19.18d and 27.26d). Significantly a rare *Mahābhārata* term *varāhakarṇa* is attested at 3.537* 6. Besides the bow itself, the bow-string is occasionally mentioned (*jyā* 38 times, *guṇa* 5 times, *maurvī* twice).

and the like. These occur relatively more frequently in the second and third stages than the average for all weapons. The clear distinction made in European warfare between weapons that are hurled and those that are used for thrusting is not as obvious in ancient Indian warfare and there are signs that the distinction was more by size, although several of the weapons are poorly defined in either epic, occurring only in lists. In order of frequency, the commoner ones are *sūla*, *sakti*, *pattasa/pattiśa*, *prāsa* and *tomara* (and rare terms are *bhīndipāla*, *rṣti*, *triśūla* and *kunta*). Clubs, maces and similar weapons are slightly less often mentioned than spears and javelins but their distribution pattern is close to the average. It is therefore significant that of the two common terms *parigha* is most frequent in the first stage and *gadā* in the third, presumably indicating that the *parigha* was largely superseded by the *gadā*. Although both are large clubs, there is some evidence that the *parigha* was the larger and it is more often described as being made of metal (*āyasa*) than any other weapon in this group. Swords and related items occur only about half as often as either spears or clubs but mainly in the first and second stages, with a marked decline from the third stage onwards. The action of the sword (*khadga*, *asi*, rarely *nistrīmśa*) is always described in terms of cutting and slashing, never of piercing, so it must have been more like a broadsword than a rapier.¹⁶ Battle-axes (*paraśvadha*, *paraśu*, twice *kūthāra* and once *kuliśa*) are rarely mentioned; even rarer are the *vajra* or *asāni* (except as Indra's weapon), *cakra*, *pāśa*, *danda*, *yantra*, *yasti*, *śataghnī*, *kṣepanī* and *musundī/bhusundī*, all of which occur occasionally in the *Mahābhārata*. There are also occasional references to the Vānaras in particular seizing branches or whole trees, rocks and boulders to use as weapons and also using their teeth, nails and fists.

The strategies and conventions of warfare receive much less frequent mention than weapons, for basically the same reason that the ordinary soldier is little mentioned, since the poets concentrate on the spectacular set pieces of the major duels at the expense of the less dramatic. Enough incidental reference is found, however, to establish some general principles. Campaigning inevitably stops with the arrival of the monsoon, as shown for example by Rāma's wait for Sugrīva to redeem his promise once the rains were over. So too

¹⁶ There is a slight exception in certain lists of weapons thrown (e.g. 3.24.23), which include swords as well as other hand-held weapons such as axes.

it is normal for fighting to stop for the night and, for example, Khara when facing Rāma cuts short his boasting for fear the sun would set and prevent the battle (3.28.23cd). However, this convention is not invariably observed, although the one major instance, when the Vānaras and Rāksasas continue fighting after nightfall (6.34), is described in a way that suggests that it is seen as exceptional. All other conventions mentioned are as frequently breached as observed; this is particularly true of the supposed inviolability of women. Nevertheless, intervention by a third person in a duel is generally condemned but this, of course, forms part of Vālin's dying accusations against Rāma (4.17); an example of its observance is that Hanumān refrains from attacking Rāvaṇa while he is engaged with Nīla for this reason (6.47.69–70). Again, Vālin's accusations include the charge that Rāma's attack was unprovoked, while Sītā at an earlier point in the narrative warns Rāma against attacking the Rāksasas without direct provocation (3.8). In both instances the charges are made in order that they can be rebutted and reveal that the poet or reciter was unhappy with the basic narrative, all the more clearly showing that the actual events narrated are in conflict with the theory expressed in later stages. The rules and conventions of warfare were evidently not firmly established or formulated in detail in the first stage, but nowhere in the *Rāmāyaṇa* do there occur the detailed codes of conduct included in the *Mahābhārata* but only vague and general notions of fair play based essentially on the notion that combat should be between equally matched opponents.

Economic aspects and material culture

Economic life is only scantly alluded to in any stage of the text, since its authors' interests were never those of the mercantile or trading community.¹⁷ In addition, such evidence as there is suggests that the economy was relatively undeveloped in the earliest stage. There is, for example, no clear evidence for the use of coinage; as in the *Mahābhārata*, the term *nīṣka* still denotes basically a gold chest ornament (and can do even in the fourth stage, for example *dāśīnāṁ*

¹⁷ For fuller details of material in this section, except where otherwise indicated, see my *Righteous Rāma*, chapter 3 (1984: 62–87), which also includes further references to secondary literature.

niṣkakanṭhīnām at 1.1337* 7). The most commonly employed term in this field is *dhana*, wealth or property, which significantly—and not just for the sake of alliteration—is often linked with *dhānya*, grain; essentially the two terms together signify reserves, whether of valuables or of foodstuffs. The frequent mention of large numbers of cattle among items given as gifts indicates that they were still the main measure of wealth. There are only a handful of references to merchants, *vanij* or *naigama*, in the *Ayodhyākānda*, the book which contains most about city life, and of these two terms *naigama* is predominantly a late word, occurring most often in the *Uttarakānda*. Nevertheless, the standard descriptions of towns mention trade or business and markets, although details are lacking.

The means by which a king could replenish his treasury (*kośa*, rarely and only later *koṣṭhāgāra*) would have been primarily taxation in kind on the agricultural community, implied indeed in the linking of *dhana* and *dhānya* just mentioned. The only term for taxation or the like, *bali*, points even more strongly in this direction, since it means equally an offering, especially of food, to minor deities; in many ways it is better understood as ‘tribute’. One method that is mentioned in other sources by which a king could get round the lack of cash to pay for government works is the use of forced labour (*visti*); however, the only references to this in the *Rāmāyana* are both late (6.115.4 and 2.1899*) and both relate to road-making. The various terms for roads and streets are also rather more frequent in the second and later stages. The standard means of transport along such roads for the major figures is the *ratha*, a term used equally to describe the carriage suitable for travel over sizable distances and the war-chariot.

Outside a few lists in the *Ayodhyākānda*, different occupations or jobs are rarely mentioned and in fact are dominated by groups who are really various categories of royal servants. Apart from the fishermen or ferrymen (*dāśa*) who take travellers across the Gaṅgā, only fortunetellers and astrologers, mahouts, riders or grooms, guards, craftsmen, cooks and a butcher appear at all outside the lists. But in certain lists, such as that of the craftsmen needed to construct the road for Bharata (2.74.1–3) or that of the different tradesmen and artisans who accompany him (2.77.12–15), there is given a detailed and varied series of occupations, from scouts and surveyors to peacock-catchers and plasterers. However, both lists belong to the second stage (and indeed are further expanded in the fourth stage). Even the third stage broadly reflects the older pattern, although general terms for artisans

or craftsmen (*karmāntika*, *śilpin*) are slightly more frequent and the term for wages (*niskraya*) occurs for the first time. Terms for servants are commoner than those for artisans at all stages: two terms (*dāsa* and *presya*) are most frequent in the first stage, and a third one (*bhṛtya*) is found mainly in the second and third stages, while another term (*kimkara*) becomes common by the third stage; other terms (*cetī*, *paricāraka* and *parivāra*) are rare and one (*anujīvana*) is not attested until the fourth stage. Although *dāsa* is commonly translated as 'slave' and is the term most often used to denote the personal servants at the court of Ayodhyā, there is no evidence that their condition was one of actual slavery and, for example, Hanumān is happy to say to Rāvaṇa that he is Rāma's *dāsa*. Certainly, there seems nothing to support the contention by Dev Raj Chanana that slavery was found at Ayodhyā, since its society was agriculturally based, in contrast to Kiṣkindhā and Laṅkā, which were still at the food-gathering stage.¹⁸ There is no reference to buying or selling individuals (though sporadically to gifts to brāhmaṇas), apart from the story of the sale of Śunahśepa as a sacrificial victim, which is already found in Vedic literature (e.g. *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* 8.13–18) but first occurs in the *Rāmāyana* in the third stage (1.60–61).

Not only are craftsmen rarely mentioned in the earlier stages, but so are their products, although the poets of later stages show a natural tendency to include elaborate descriptions of jewellery, buildings and vehicles. Even so frequently mentioned an item as gold (for which there are as many as twenty synonyms) therefore occurs nearly twice as often in passages of the second stage as in the first stage.¹⁹ One frequent term, *jāmbūnada*, originally denoted gold from the river Jambu, a mythical river supposed to flow from Mount Meru away to the north; there is a possibility, therefore, that use of this term may preserve a memory of the Northeast being the source of gold, rather than the Deccan mines which became accessible to a North Indian power first with the Mauryans. Certainly, there is no reference to the mining of gold, although a general term for mineral ores, *dhātu*, is found occasionally (mainly in later passages). In the third stage there is found a myth of the origin of metals from Śiva's seed

¹⁸ Chanana 1960: 29. As a small point against his assertion, it is worth noting that Sītā refers to the Rākṣasī set to guard her as *dāsīs* (7.101.30–32).

¹⁹ Guruge (1991: 103–04) notes the occurrence of *swarṇa* and *hiranya* within the same sentence on a couple of occasions (7.85.15c and 6.3477* 1–2) and suggests that *hiranya* denotes uncoined bullion and *swarṇa* a gold coin.

cast off on the Himālaya by Gaṅgā and this also ranks the metals: gold superior, copper and iron middling, and tin and lead inferior (1.36.18–19). Silver is absent from this list (although the commentators attempt to include it by asserting that one of the two terms for gold here denotes silver) and this matches its rarity throughout the text by comparison with gold, occurring only one tenth as often. This may well reflect the different methods needed to procure each metal; alluvial gold was obtained by panning and so was more accessible to primitive technology than silver, which must be mined (cf. 4.39.22, referring to the earth as the source of silver). It is also the case that silver has always been scarcer relative to gold in India than in Europe. However, the baser metals are very little mentioned in general. The main point of interest is that the usual term, *tāmra*, for copper or its derivatives, brass and bronze, is nearly half as frequent again as terms that definitely mean iron (*loha*, *kārṣṇāyasa* and *kālāyasa*); since the term *ayas*, ‘metal’, shows a similar distribution pattern to that for *tāmra*, it is likely that it still designates copper or bronze (as the use of *kārṣṇāyas* and *kālāyas* also suggests). However, it is generally agreed that the use of iron became general in India around 800 B.C., which would mean that even the early phases of the epic display great conservatism (although it may be noted that adherence to the older pattern on precisely this point is a well known feature of Homer).

Cities and urban life are seen only in relation to the three cities of Ayodhyā, Kiśkindhā and Laṅkā, since it is only of these three that any detailed description is given, although other cities are mentioned incidentally. The fullest description is in fact that of Laṅkā—in particular of its fortifications but also of Rāvaṇa’s palace and other prominent buildings. Guruge considers that, while the descriptions of Ayodhyā and Laṅkā are to a large extent realistic, that of Kiśkindhā is merely imaginary.²⁰ All three cities, however, are described in broadly similar terms and Kiśkindhā is just as affluent and cultured as the other two, despite the relative lateness of much of this sort of detail and the growing trend towards depicting the Vānaras as uncouth monkeys. On the whole, although it is clear that city life as such was a reality by the time of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the later the description the more idealised it is and it is indeed questionable how far

²⁰ Guruge 1991: 91.

any of the cities are described realistically.²¹ Typical of this is the fact that the fullest picture of Ayodhyā is given early in the *Bālakānda*, where it is described as created by Manu, being twelve *yojanas* by three in extent, with its main highway well constructed and regularly sprinkled with water, with well laid out markets, and with a grid-pattern layout (1.5.6–22). It may also be noted that the descriptions of cities in the *Rāmāyaṇa* are somewhat fuller than in the *Mahābhārata*, although it is a moot point whether this is because in the *Mahābhārata* cities were not so well established as to permit such detailed description or because they were too familiar to warrant it.

Generalising from these clearly conventional descriptions of cities gives the following picture of towns and their architecture as the poets saw them at the different stages of growth. In all stages a city was regularly fortified with a moat, ramparts and gateways. Although moats (*parikhā*) are not very frequently mentioned, all three of the main cities have one and it is the only feature of Rājagrha alluded to (2.64.1), while Bharata's camp is protected by one (2.74.17). The ramparts or city wall (*prākāra*), forming the next line of defence, are mentioned more often and as much in all stages. But the gateways are the most often mentioned of the three types of fortification. The terms *dvār* or *dvāra* are very common, especially in the first stage, where the term *gopura* is uncommon, though becoming commoner in the second stage, and the term *pratolī* is rarer still. The archways, *torana*, which are a feature of the interior of the city rather than forming part of the gateways, are often mentioned at all periods, whereas watch-towers or turrets (*attā*, *attāla*, *attālaka*) and cisterns or tanks (*prapā*) are typical of the second stage. The different aspects of fortification as a whole are as common in the first stage as in the second, while referring to a city simply as fortified or as a fort (*durga*, either as adjective or substantive) is much more frequent in the first stage than the second.

By contrast, mentions of buildings and parts of buildings are almost twice as frequent in the second stage as the first, in line with the tendency of the second stage to include elaborate descriptions of all kinds; however, by the third stage such terms are again less frequent, reflecting the shift away from poetic elaboration towards

²¹ Nevertheless, Alles (1988–89: 229–30) uses the argument that a highly developed urban civilisation (along with the wealth attributed to Laṅkā) is central to Vālmīki's concept of the narrative as a major factor in assigning Vālmīki to the Śunga period.

mythological and didactic episodes. The courtyard of a house or palace is commonly mentioned and was presumably an original feature, since it is as common in early passages as late; the usual term is *kakṣyā*, which denotes as much the enclosure wall, while the other two terms, *catuska* and *catvara*, reveal its standard shape as being a quadrangle. The inner apartments, *antahpura*, were regularly located within several such courtyards. The picture of a house or palace presented in the first stage is simply that of a building or buildings set in one or more courtyards,²² probably with pitched roofs, a considerable amount of ornament in gold and jewels, a raised dais and possibly pillars. Only from the second stage and later do descriptions contain any definite indication of multi-storey buildings (since staircases are now mentioned) or any elaboration of detail about floors. The furniture within these houses must have been extremely simple in form, even if richly ornamented at times, with only seats and beds mentioned at all frequently and occasional mention of blankets, coverlets and cushions.

Terms for clothing are mostly quite general and in all stages words for clothes are followed in frequency by terms for belts and girdles, indicating that the type of clothing was simply a loose piece of cloth draped and secured by a belt; loose enough, for example, for Rāma to wipe his eyes with the end of his garment (4.7.14). Sītā's wearing of a single garment in captivity (e.g. 5.13.20) is directly the result of her having discarded her *uttariya* to provide a clue to her whereabouts (3.52.2, etc.) but also aptly symbolises her wretchedness; the norm for most women seems to have been two garments, although Añjanā, Hanumān's mother, appears to be wearing just one when Vāyu strips her (4.65.12–13). The type of material of which clothes are made is in fact the feature most often identified. The most frequent is the bark-cloth of the ascetics' garments, which Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa and Sītā also put on for their exile, for which the earlier term is *cīra* but more commonly *valkala* in the third stage. Next commonest are the skins or hides (*ajina*, *kṛṣṇājina*) which ascetics also wear and are a distinctive mark. Only then come the ordinary woven fabrics, of which the most frequent is *kauśeya* (with 20 occurrences of which slightly more are in early passages). This term regularly means silk in post-epic literature but large-scale trade in cultivated silk cloth from China seems to have developed only in the 1st century B.C. to the 1st century A.D., which is much later than the period to which any

²² The usual number of courtyards is three but occasionally seven are mentioned (2.51.15 and 2.307*).

serious scholar has assigned the early *Rāmāyaṇa*; however, wild silk (tussore silk and the like) has been produced in India since an early period, the formation of the term *kauśeya* being taught by Pāṇini 4.3.42 from *kośa*, ‘cocoon’, indicating knowledge of its manufacture and not just of the finished product.²³ It is possibly significant that the description of Sītā as *pītakauśeyavāsin* occurs only in the second stage and that there is no other term for silk in the text. A dozen mentions of linen, *ksauma*, indicate that it too was used by the nobility and their servants and that it was evidently a prestige fabric; however, all but one of the references are from the second or later stages.

There is not a great deal of change in frequency of mention of clothing between the first and second stages, but ornaments and other accessories are twice as frequent in the second stage (where descriptions of women tend to be elaborated by the variety of ornaments mentioned), although the frequency declines sharply again in the third stage as a result of its different interests. However, there are very different distribution patterns for the various types of ornament. Garlands or wreaths of flowers are almost as frequent in the first stage as the second and are indeed the most frequent single item of ornament mentioned in the first stage. By contrast, terms for necklaces are almost wholly absent from the first stage, one (*hāra*) is common from the second stage onwards, and any other term is very rare. The *niṣka*, denoting a golden ornament worn on the breast (as shown by 6.64.5), was probably a kind of brooch rather than a necklace and is mentioned occasionally. The three terms for bracelets or armlets (*angada*, *keyūra* and *valaya*) may denote slightly different ornaments, to judge by their occasional juxtaposition; the greater frequency of *angada* is a result of play on Angada’s name on several occasions. They are worn as much by men as by women, whereas anklets, *nūpura*, are particularly a woman’s ornament and occur mainly in the second stage. Earrings, *kunḍala*, are also worn by both sexes and mentioned in all stages, though commonest in the second. Less common ornaments are the *kirīṭa* (linked most with the Rākṣasas and commonest in the second stage), *mukuta*, *cūḍāmanī* (which seems specific to Rāma and Sītā) and *angulīya(ka)*, the last of which is only used of

²³ For detailed discussion on this point see Hartmut Scharfe (1993: 281–92). However, H. D. Sankalia (1973a: 56–57) firmly identifies *kauśeya* as silk, meaning Chinese silk, and uses it as an argument for a relatively late date. He wrongly affirms that Sītā is the only person to wear the fabric, although the majority of its occurrences do relate to her.

the token that Rāma entrusts to Hanumān (1.3.18, 4.43.11 and 5.34.2); hairstyles are also little mentioned, apart from the matted locks, *jatā*, of ascetics, although it is likely that the hair was usually worn long, while Sītā adopts a single braid as a sign of mourning during her captivity (*ekavēṇīdhara*). Two quite common accessories, especially in the second stage, are umbrellas (*chatra*, rarely *ātapatra*) and fans (*vyajana*, *cāmara*, *vālavyajana*), which are a symbol in particular of court life, or rather of the servants to wield them.

Food and drink as a whole are mentioned with much the same frequency throughout the first three stages of growth but this masks a substantial shift in the type of reference made, which becomes still more obvious in the fourth stage. A rather stereotyped classification of types of food by the method of consuming them occurs in the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa*: Guha offers Rāma *bhakṣyam bhojyam ca peyam ca lehyam ca* at 2.44.15ab and Bharadvāja summons *bhakṣyam bhojyam ca cosyam ca lehyam ca* to feed Bharata's troops at 2.85.17cd. There is quite frequent reference throughout to the diet of ascetics, which is typically stated as being fruit and roots gathered from the forest (often in the earlier stages in the stereotyped compound *phalamūlāśana* and the like, but later sometimes elaborated into a whole list of different fruit, as at 2.645*). Apart from that, the first stage makes much the most frequent references to meat-eating, with numerous allusions to Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa killing game for their consumption and also for sacrifice, whereas in the third and fourth stages the standard diet mentioned consists of various sorts of gruel or mash, mention is frequently made of foods appropriate for oblations, for feasting brāhmans and so on, and condemnation of meat-eating is implicit in several of the mythological episodes. This broad pattern is essentially the same as that found in the *Mahābhārata*.

The change in attitudes does not, however, manifest itself uniformly. There is one occasion in the first stage where Rāma describes himself as an ascetic whose diet is fruit and roots, as he declines Guha's offered meal (2.44.19–20), although there are alternative explanations of just what lies behind this refusal and it may be noted that Guha, when narrating the incident later, ascribes it to *kṣatriya* custom (2.81.14–15).²⁴ More definitely, meat-eating is still casually mentioned

²⁴ E. W. Hopkins (1889a) regards this episode as an example of the *kṣatriya* attitude of not being indebted to anyone in deliberate contrast to brāhmaṇ eagerness to accept gifts; on this view, not even refusal to accept food from someone of lower caste is necessarily involved.

sporadically in later stages. However, the overall trend is obvious and terms for meat (*māṃsa, āmiṣa*) become steadily less common after the first stage, despite having to be mentioned in those later passages which condemn the practice of meat-eating, as the *Rāmāyaṇa* comes to reflect brāhmaṇa rather than *kṣatriya* values. A vegetarian diet as such is ascribed only to the ascetics in the forest, more as an expression of their rejection of society and organised labour than out of respect for animal life. Although cereals are not directly mentioned as food, three dishes prepared from rice and milk in different ways are named (*pāyasa, kṛṣara, odana*), though not commonly and not in the first stage. Dairy products are also not mentioned at all frequently and are commonest in the fourth stage, where use in ritual is the reason for the greater frequency. Among sweeteners, both honey and sugar are mentioned; however, honey (*madhu, kṣaudra*) occurs most often in the first stage and progressively less often in later stages, but sugar is distinctly rare and later, whether refined (*sārkarā*) or as cane (*ikṣu*), while sweets or confectionary are also mainly late. The term *madhu* can also, of course, denote a fermented drink (originally no doubt a sort of mead, but used more generally in the *Rāmāyaṇa*) but the context normally makes clear which meaning is appropriate and the meaning of honey is common at all stages.

Terms for drink, of which the majority are for alcoholic drinks, occur most often in the first stage and with diminishing frequency thereafter, basically because alcohol, like meat-eating, was not acceptable to the later redactors of the epic. Descriptions of Ayodhyā, Kiskindhā and Laṅkā as all fragrant with liquor (2.106.14 and 21, 4.32.7 and 5.9.19) are typical of the first stage and also of the second (from which also comes the description of the lavish entertainment in Bharadvāja's *āśrama*), but expressions of disapproval are common from the fourth stage. Sankalia sees these as reflecting the lavish use of wine shown by finds of Roman amphorae from many parts of India, as well as by scenes of revelry on the railings at Nāgārjunakonda and Mathurā.²⁵ Non-alcoholic drink is mentioned much less, and the general term *pāna* for drinking or a drink is often used of alcohol, but water is mentioned with reasonable frequency, including mention of sources as clear and good to drink and condemnation of anyone who fouls drinking water.

²⁵ Sankalia 1973b: 154–55.

Wildlife and agriculture

As the pattern of reference to meat-eating indicates, with the frequent mention of killing game, some of the food supply was still hunted or collected, and agriculture was not particularly valued.²⁶ This reflects the attitudes of those involved rather than the degree of progress at large, since on the one hand hunting was clearly an aristocratic activity in this culture as much as elsewhere and on the other hand the ascetic way of life in the forest was based on the concept of gathering what nature provided (the same pattern is seen, of course, in the *Mahābhārata*). Nevertheless, the frequency of mention of wildlife of all kinds suggests that attitudes to the natural world were on the whole positive, although there are from time to time remarks contrasting the ease of court life and the hardships of the forest (e.g. 2.36.9, 52.7, 54.7–16, 55.4–6 and 60.8). Accordingly, deer and antelopes are mentioned most often in the first stage, with a lower proportion of mentions in the third stage than for other types of fauna. By far the most frequent term is *mrga*, a general term for deer and indeed for wild animals in general, but often specifically denoting the blackbuck or Indian antelope (*Antilope cervicapra* L.).

On the whole, most animals and birds are in fact slightly commoner in the second stage but with wide individual variations; the main reason for greater frequency in the second stage and a reduced one in the third, seen even more clearly with the flora, is that many names are added in the type of expansion for aesthetic reasons which is found in the second stage but is absent from the third stage: the descriptions of nature at large or of the surrounding scenery. Indeed, if horses and the like did not occur fairly evenly in all stages because of their links with kings and with warfare, the frequency and variety of animals mentioned in the third stage would be even less. The different terms for horse show some variation in distribution, with *asvā* always the commonest but *haya* nearly as frequent in the first stage and a third term *vājin* commoner in the second stage than the first; other words are infrequent but include terms for a mare and a colt. Asses (*khara*, once *gardabha*) are quite commonly mentioned both as mounts and for drawing vehicles, usually simply as an alternative to horses and without any difference of status. Elephants (*gaja*, *kuñjara*,

²⁶ For fuller details of material in this and the next section, except where otherwise indicated, see my *Righteous Rāma*, chapter 4 (1984: 88–123).

nāga, dvīpa, hastin, vāraṇa and *mātanga* in order of frequency) are most frequently mentioned in battle contexts, to a greater extent even than horses, with the result that an absolute majority of references to them occurs in the second stage, since their use in battle is a later feature. Indeed elephants occur more frequently in the second stage than horses, though slightly less frequent overall. In most cases elephants are domesticated but there are passages of naturalistic description which include them among the wildlife of the forest (e.g. 3.10.4–6).

Cattle (*go*, also *rśabha, paśu, vṛṣa, vatsa, vrśabha, dhenu*) are mentioned only half as frequently as either horses or elephants, reflecting the martial, rather than the pastoral, interests of the epic. The buffalo (*mahiṣa*), however, is always a wild animal, sometimes killed for its meat. Other domestic animals of any kind are relatively uncommon in the first stage and more frequent in the third stage compared with other animals, but not really frequent at any stage, just as in the *Mahābhārata* domesticated animals are mentioned less often than wild animals. This is again due to the particular interests of the text, shown even with this group by the fact that camels (*uṣṭra*) are more frequent than goats (*aja, chāga*) or sheep (*meṣa*), because camels are used for transport and so also for warfare, whereas sheep and goats are reared for their meat. Although camels naturally belong to the drier NW parts of India, they are nevertheless mentioned in connection with the forces of Laṅkā. Dogs (*śvan*) are used mainly for hunting and are domesticated, but the rare references to cats (*mājāra, bidāla*) show clearly that they are wild.

A considerable number of wild animals are mentioned. The commonest is the lion (*siṃha* or rarely *kesarin*), which as in many cultures is a symbol of courage and strength; the term *siṃha* is not infrequently also found as the final element of compounds denoting pre-eminence and valour. The same is true of the words for the tiger (*vyāghra, sārdūla*) but these are not so frequent to denote the animal itself. Bears, monkeys, jackals and wild boar are referred to from time to time, while mention is also made, but only rarely, of wolves, hyenas, porcupines, rhinoceros, mongoose, hare, rat or mouse, and leopard. Whereas general terms for animals are uncommon, those for birds are quite frequent and in fact there are several groups of terms: the largest group refers to their going in the air, the next refers to them as flying or winged, and another defines them as laying eggs. These general terms for birds show basically the same distribution pattern as for the fauna as a whole but names of different

species are rather more frequent in the second stage, with its passages of nature description, and much less common in the third stage than the average. In total, a very large number of different birds is named; those commonly mentioned in the first stage are vultures, geese, crows, peacocks, herons, ospreys and cranes.

Snakes, other reptiles and amphibia are a little more frequent in the second stage than the average for the fauna as a whole. Presumably this is because they are largely peripheral to the story, occurring either in similes or in the lists of wildlife found in descriptive passages. None of the terms is as specific as those for mammals and birds. Similes involving snakes include two stereotyped images, of the hand as like a five-headed snake and of an angry person being like a hissing snake, which are favoured in battle scenes. Fish and other water creatures are mentioned only about a hundred times, but over a third of these are references to the conch, the shell of which is used as a trumpet and which is therefore common in the battle scenes of the *Yuddha* and *Uttara kāṇḍas*. Insects and the like form an even smaller group, of which two thirds of the occurrences are in the second stage. Bees, with ten mentions in the text, are the most frequent but this paucity of mention is in marked contrast with their frequency in classical poetry.

As already indicated, there is relative lack of mention of animal husbandry and agriculture at all stages. This could be explained in two ways: either agriculture had not been developed much at that period or else the interests of poets and audience did not lie in that direction. The second is obviously the right explanation, since by the time of the poem the Gaṅgā valley was certainly well colonised and this would have required advanced agricultural techniques; if nothing else, the location of Daśaratha's capital at Ayodhyā points to this, while Kausalyā is said to own a thousand villages (2.28.7). Nevertheless, terms for a plough (*hala*, *lāngala*, *phāla*) are rare and occur mainly in later stages. Rice (*kalama*, *nīvāra*, *naivāra*, later *sāli*) is the only specific grain mentioned in early parts of the text and was clearly the principal crop, although the few references to a wet-crop field (*kedāra*) are from the second and third stages, with a single mention indirectly of irrigation through the term *adevamāṭyka* 'not dependent on the gods' for rain (2.94.39, cf. Mbh. 2.5.67 and KA 5.2.2). Other cereals are mentioned in the later stages (wheat and barley in the second, and millet in the fourth), and legumes or pulses are referred to from the second stage onwards. Commercial exploitation of the forests receives

little mention at any stage of growth of the text, although frequent references to sandalwood (*candana*, *raktacandana*) show that it was a valued commodity, as was the aloe wood (*aguru*) with which it is sometimes linked;²⁷ but it is not clear whether such trees were actually cultivated or their products gathered from wild specimens.

Among plants and trees the lotus is naturally the most frequently mentioned, with a wide range of names occurring (*kamala*, *nalina/nalinī*, *pankaja*, *padma*, *pundarīka* and *puskara* being the most frequent). The other plants mentioned with any frequency in the first stage are *āsoka*, *iingudi*, *karnikāra*, *kimśuka*, *kuśa* and *darbha*, *candana*, *tāla*, *nyagrodha*, *śimśapā* and *sāla* (also quite frequently *āsvakarṇa*). The last of these, the *sāla* (*Shorea robusta* Gaertn. f.), was no doubt then widespread in the *Gangā* basin and is still common on the Chota Nagpur plateau; it often occurs in pure stands, as the *Rāmāyaṇa* several times implies, and the Vānaras use *sāl* trees as weapons in the battles for Laṅkā (e.g. 6.33.31, 63.19 and 85.12). Although the fourth stage does include among the trees mentioned a few which are typical of South India, the text as a whole shows little knowledge of the distinctive flora of the south. The same is true of its allusions to climate. The two most extensive passages—Lakṣmaṇa’s description of winter (3.15) and Rāma’s description of the rainy season (4.7)—both belong to the second stage and both reflect the situation in northern India rather than that in Daṇḍakāranya, which is located according to tradition in the Deccan.

Geographical horizons

As those two descriptions indicate, the geographical horizons of the poets tended to be limited to the area of the *Gangā* basin, with a fair knowledge also of the Indus region, and this needs to be borne in mind in any assessment of the geographical data of the *Rāmāyaṇa*.²⁸ Regrettably, discussion has mainly focused in the past around the question of the location of Laṅkā, with one party seeking to uphold the traditional identification of Laṅkā with Ceylon (nowadays renamed Sri Lanka) and the other seeking to locate it somewhere in the Madhya Pradesh area.²⁹ This emphasis has tended to mask the fact that the

²⁷ There is also one later reference to camphor (*karpūra*, 6.116.51).

²⁸ For a good general survey of the geographical information see also Guruge 1991: 51–89.

²⁹ One of the first contributions to this debate was by F. E. Pargiter (1894), who

Rāmāyaṇa mentions other journeys than Rāma's exile and other towns besides Ayodhyā and Laṅkā.³⁰ Ayodhyā on the Sarayū (modern Sarju or Gogra) is the capital of Daśaratha's kingdom of Kosala, whereas in Buddhist literature the capital of Kosala is Śravastī (Pāli Sāvatthi), and indeed such a shift of capital is alluded to at the end of the *Uttarakānda* with the abandonment of Ayodhyā (7.98.5). Apart from the places directly associated with Rāma's exile, the poets of the first stage show acquaintance only with North India, but there give a wealth of information, for example in the realistic description (though somewhat garbled in transmission) of the route of the messengers sent to recall Bharata from Rājagrha in the Pañjab and Bharata's own route on his return, where the messengers take the most direct route practicable but Bharata takes a more northerly arc, passing closer to the foothills of the Himālaya.³¹ Incidentally, it is worth noting that there is no mention until the third stage of the otherwise better known Rājagrha in Bihar and none at all of its successor as capital of Magadha, Pāṭaliputra. Equally, Janaka's kingdom of Videha was no longer an independent kingdom by the 6th century B.C. and Kosala itself was defeated by Ajātaśatru of Magadha. In general, the picture of the political situation with a multiplicity of small states is pre-Mauryan and probably pre-Buddhist, though presumably later than that of the *Mahābhārata*, with its political focus around Kurukṣetra.

The forests mentioned are not clearly distinguished from each other. The forest region begins almost immediately south of the Gaṅgā and surrounds Prayāga, but is clearly largely unknown territory; the progress of the exiles into it is marked in units of a day's journey rather than any exact distances. Daṇḍakāranya is apparently the most extensive and reaches as far as the Gaṅgā, since Guha's territory is said to lie within it (2.78.11), although on other occasions its boundary seems to be placed further south and it is most precisely located in the third stage, in the legend which makes it the former territory

examined the geographical data concerning Rāma's exile from the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the *Rāmopakhyaṇa* and the *Sodāśarajakya* (Mbh. 7 App. 8), locating Kiśkindhā near Bellary and accepting Laṅkā as being Ceylon. See further below.

³⁰ Discussion of the location and historicity of Ayodhyā as the capital of Daśaratha and Rāma has naturally burgeoned since the 1980s. Among this proliferation of often rather acrimonious debate, more serious studies include Ganga Sagar Rai (1991) and several of the articles in the two special issues of *Purāṇa* 36 (1994).

³¹ Incidentally, the messengers cross the Gaṅgā at Hastinapura and pass Kuru-jāngala (2.62.10) but there is not a hint of the association of these localities with the *Mahābhārata*.

of king Daṇḍa, between the Vindhya and Śaivala mountains (7.70.16–17 and 72.17). Janasthāna is often named in a manner which suggests that it is on or around Mount Citrakūṭa, but it may also be more or less identified with Daṇḍaka, while Pañcavatī is another subdivision of the Daṇḍaka forest, which on occasion seems identical to Janasthāna. However, Pañcavatī, and also Agastya's *āśrama*, occur only from the second stage onwards, although Agastya himself is occasionally mentioned at all stages as the protector of the southern direction. In general, though, the second stage does not add a great deal to the geographical picture either in the north or the south. The one exception to this is the search party accounts (4.39–42), which are obviously late in comparison with the rest of the second stage and indeed are not very different from the third stage in their geographical knowledge;³² these are apparently arranged systematically in that each party searches one of the compass points (this layout is a feature shared with many of the geographical sections of the *Mahābhārata* discussed in the fourth chapter). The centre from which the four directions are surveyed seems, however, to lie in the Gaigā-Yamunā doāb, or slightly to its north or south. This does not fit at all well with the position of Kiṣkindhā, where Sugrīva issues these instructions, even in its more probable location in the central Madhya Pradesh area, still less in its traditional location at or near Hampi on the Tuṅgabhadrā river. In reality, the compiler of the search party accounts is envisaging India from the viewpoint of a North Indian of the early centuries A.D.

In the third stage, the most striking feature of the material is the extent to which it reflects the growth of urbanisation. Half the new geographical names occurring are of towns and villages, including the great urban centres of Kauśāmbī, Girivraja (its name for Rājagṛha), Takṣaśilā, Pratiṣṭhāna, Madhurā (= Mathurā), Mahodaya (modern Kanauj) and Viśālā; in addition, the *Uttarakāṇḍa* narrates the foundation of cities by the sons of Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa (7.92.1–9 and 98.4–5). The mention of the peoples of the Pahlavas, Śakas and Yavanas gives a fairly clear indication of the period involved, the 1st to 2nd centuries A.D. In the fourth and fifth stages a large number of place names are added, which reflect both the increased precision aimed at in some of these additions and the political and economic situation of later periods still; thus, in the northwest mention is made of both

³² Cf. the discussion of the dating of these *sargas* in the previous chapter.

Puṣkarāvatī (modern Charsada, near Peshawar) and Śākala (modern Sialkot, found however in the text of the *Mahābhārata* at 8.30.14).

The vagueness of the distances given for anywhere south of the Gaṅgā and the evidence for steadily increasing geographical knowledge over time, but in particular only a late acquaintance with South India, suggest that the location of Kiśkindhā and Laṅkā is not as distant as later tradition maintains. In the first stage, the effective southern limit of Aryan settlement is the line of the Yamunā and Gaṅgā rivers, with only some vague knowledge of the country to the south as far as the Vindhya and the Mahendra mountains. The name Vindhya may indeed have been rather less exact in meaning than later, referring to the whole complex of mountain chains in the northwest of the Deccan. It is likely, therefore, that both Kiśkindhā and Laṅkā would have lain in the upland areas approximately between Jabalpur and the Chota Nagpur plateau, either in reality or only in the poet's imagination; whether we can ever identify the localities intended is doubtful at best. Frequent attempts have been made, however, in particular, Kibe located Laṅkā on the Amarakanṭaka mountain, while Paramasiva Iyer argued for the Indrāṇā hill about eighteen miles north of Jabalpur.³³ In all probability Laṅkā has become a proper name from a term meaning simply an island or an isolated hill and certainly there are several Godāvarī rivers, if indeed that was not also a descriptive term in origin. Quite apart from the inherent improbability of the traditional identification of Laṅkā with Ceylon, there is no evidence for the currency of the name there until long after the composition of the *Rāmāyana*, though possibly at too early a date for it to be due to acquaintance with the epic; however, if it is in origin a general term, this does not present any real difficulty.

If the exile is set in this general area, the view that the Vānaras and Rākṣasas are mythologised aboriginal tribes of this area is at least plausible, since in the early stages of Aryan advance southwards such peoples would have posed serious obstacles or been potentially

³³ Kibe 1928 and 1936, and T. Paramasiva Iyer 1940; cf. also Guruge 1991: 67–69 for a résumée of the arguments in favour of Ceylon. Subsequently H. D. Sankalia (1973a) supported Paramasiva Iyer's identification of Laṅkā on Mt Trikūṭa with Indrana Hill in Madhya Pradesh, while U. P. Shah (1976) adduced further evidence from the *Uttarakāṇḍa* in support of Kibe's view, while also suggesting that the name Laṅkā is a Sanskritised, non-Aryan word of proto-Dravidian origin. Asim Kumar Chatterjee (1980–82) has challenged the arguments for locating Laṅkā in Madhya Pradesh and insists that it is in the far south, without explicitly identifying it with the modern Sri Lanka.

important allies; there is little to be gained, however, from pursuing this point. Some groups clearly are tribal, such as the Niṣādas who in the first stage are depicted as allies and more or less equals of the people of Ayodhyā but who in the third stage are definitely inferior and even despised, as is graphically shown by the well known story of Vālmīki witnessing the Niṣāda hunter killing the *krauñca* bird (1.2.9–14) and also by Viśvāmitra cursing Vasiṣṭha's son to such status (1.58.21). Although there are Nāga tribes to the present day in India (nowadays in Assam but earlier in Central India), the Nāgas are probably the most mythologised group in the epic, since they are partly identified with the snakes that the term also denotes and partly equated with semi-divine groups such as the Yakṣas and Gandharvas.

The fluctuating treatment of the Vānaras, as basically human and as mere monkeys, is found at all stages. Their usual name, deriving from *vana*, 'forest', simply denotes their habitat and says nothing about their status; two other common terms, *kapi* and *hari*, both indicated their tawny colour and so are not decisive, while terms which clearly denote monkeys are much less frequent. Much about them is clearly human: Kiṣkindhā is described in the same terms as Ayodhyā and Laṅkā, its citizens are well dressed and ornamented (4.32.23), and it represents civilisation in relation to Rāma's vow to remain in the forest (4.25.9).

The main feature of the Rākṣasas is quite simply their hostility to the ascetics living in the forest and subsequently to Rāma. Agastya's claim to patronage of the southern region includes his having pacified the Rākṣasas (3.10.79–82) and this serves to highlight the extent to which the Rākṣasas are feared or hated because of their opposition to Aryan expansion. As Pollock has stressed, they are very much a symbol of the other, onto which the poet projects the suppressed fears and desires of himself and his society; their portrayal is thus not so much realistic as imaginative.³⁴ Thus, although their cultured behaviour puts them on a par with the inhabitants of Ayodhyā, their ability to change shape at will (an ability shared with the Vānaras) and their aggressive sexuality (at least as represented by Śūrpaṇakhā and Rāvaṇa) are an index of the fascination and repulsion which they generate and of which they are the product.

³⁴ Pollock 1985–86 (repeated 1991 with some variation in his translation of the *Aranyakānda*, *Rāmāyana* 1984–: III, 68–84).

Cultural and social aspects

A stratified society is implicit throughout the *Rāmāyana*, but the extent and strictness of that stratification does seem to have changed.³⁵ The broad picture presented in the first stage is that of the ruler (more a chieftain than an absolute monarch), surrounded by his court and army, contrasted with his other subjects; the four *varṇas* are not mentioned until the second stage and more particularly the third, just as the narrative part of the *Mahābhārata* shows little interest in *varna* concepts. The subjects as a whole are called *prajā*, *jana* or *janapada*, while the term *paurajānapada* (either qualifying *jana* or alone) is used for the inhabitants of town and country, to indicate the totality of the population, although the townsfolk, *paura*, are mentioned rather more frequently than the countryfolk, *jānapada*, particularly from the second stage onwards. On many occasions when an enumeration of the *varṇas* to define the population as a whole might have been expected, lists of different groups occur (for example, 2.13.1–2, 75.11ab, even 6.115.13).³⁶ The most striking feature of such lists is the relative prominence of the leading merchants—a situation only paralleled in the early Buddhist texts—which possibly reflects a relatively transient phase of society before the growing pressures of later orthodoxy eliminated it; however, this feature is found only in such incidental listings and not at all in the narrative.

References to the four *varṇas* are almost all incidental, indicating that little significance was attached to the topic.³⁷ On one occasion, however, in a cosmogonic discourse from the second stage the *Puruṣasūkta* scheme for the origin of the four *varṇas* is given, although they are sired by Kaśyapa on Dakṣa's daughter Manu (3.13.29–30), and in the third stage Nārada bewails the decline of *dharma* in successive *yugas* as the other *varṇas* usurp the privileges of brāhmans (7.65.8–26, cf. 7.67.10). There is no reference as such to ‘confusion of castes’,

³⁵ For fuller details of material in this section, except where otherwise indicated, see my *Righteous Rāma*, chapter 6 (1984: 153–93), which also includes further references to secondary literature.

³⁶ The inevitable tendency operating to regularise any mention of the *varṇas* to the standard pattern of four means that in many passages single manuscripts, or perhaps two or three, have variant readings intended to achieve this.

³⁷ They are found at 1.1.75, 79, 6.16–17, 12.12, 17cd, 24.15, 25.5, 2.15.11, 76.30b, 98.57, 5.33.11, 6.113.29, 7.65.8–26 and 67.10. The word *varṇa* is much commoner in the general sense of colour or complexion than in the sense of a social group. For the material in this paragraph, see also J. L. Brockington 1995a: 97–108.

although it is implicit in some other episodes included in later stages, nor is tension or conflict between the *varṇas* expressed in either the first or second stages. However, besides Nārada's dirge, the third stage includes the lengthy Viśvāmitra episode (1.31–64, cf. Mbh. 1.165), which centres on the antagonism between the brāhmaṇa Vasiṣṭha and the *kṣatriya* Viśvāmitra. Superficially this story points to the separateness and mutual distinctiveness of the *varṇas* but its ramifications paint a somewhat different picture when looked at in detail. The main focus of the quarrel is Vasiṣṭha's wonder-cow. When Viśvāmitra resorts to force in his attempt to seize her, she helps Vasiṣṭha to resist by creating hundreds of foreign warriors: Pahlavas, Śakas, Yavanas, Kāmbojas, Mlecchas, Hāritas and Kirātas (1.53.18–54.3, cf. Mbh. 1.165.35–37).³⁸ Quite apart from providing an approximate dating for this passage (as noted in chapter 4 for the *Mahābhārata* equivalent), mention of the Pahlavas, Śakas and Yavanas is interesting because their role in this context is to defend brāhmaṇical values; this accords with the fact that they were ranked in the *dharmaśāstras* as 'degenerate *kṣatriyas*' in recognition of their status as rulers.³⁹ There is also a rather pale reflection of the traditional hostility of the brāhmaṇa Rāma Jāmadagnya towards *kṣatriyas* (1.73–75), when he challenges Daśaratha and his party and the brāhmaṇas with Daśaratha express the hope that he will not again exterminate the *kṣatriyas*.

The change of attitudes over the period of growth of the epic is clearly illustrated by the terms for members of the *varṇas*. In each case the majority of references numerically come from the third stage (which constitutes barely a quarter of the entire text) and within the *Ayodhyā* to *Yuddha kāṇḍas* a higher proportion occurs in the second stage. The commonest term for brāhmaṇas in the first and second stages is *brāhmaṇa* but in the third stage *dvija* (which, along with the less frequent *dvijāti*, is always used in the more restricted sense, not of all three upper *varṇas*) is more than twice as common and *brahma* (which is very rare outside the third stage) is nearly twice as common as *brāhmaṇa*, while the less common *vipra* is also found mainly

³⁸ The equivalent *Mahābhārata* passage has an even longer list of war-like groups (1.165.35–37): Pahlavas, Śabaras, Śakas, Yavanas, Punḍras, Kirātas, Dramiḍas, Simhalas, Barbaras, Daradas and *mlecchas*, collectively summed up as *mlecchas*.

³⁹ Since these foreign groups had acquired political power, they had to be incorporated in some way into the structure of society and so the term 'degenerate *kṣatriya*' (*vrātyakṣatriya*) gained currency to designate them. It was held that they were originally *kṣatriyas* whose loss of status was due to non-performance of rituals or disregard of the brāhmaṇas (cf. *Manu* 10.43–45).

in the third and fourth stages. Cows and brāhmans are linked in the manner typical of developed Hinduism in the *Bālakānda* (1.24.13c and 25.5a), in which food taboos are also invoked in the story of Triśanku as a *candāla* inviting brāhmans to a sacrifice and their horror at this (1.58.15, cf. the story of Matanga at Mbh. 13.28–30), as well as the mention of dog-eating *mustikas* (1.58.20).⁴⁰ The idea that brāhmans are gods on earth is not found until the fourth stage (*bhūmidevāḥ*, 2 App. 2.22), although Daśaratha comes near to it in the third stage when in appealing to Viśvāmitra he declares that he is a god to him (*mama . . . daivatam hi bhavān*, 1.19.20cd).

Although *kṣatriyas* are referred to more often in later stages, the increase in frequency is not as marked as with the brāhmans, except for the abstract or generic term *kṣatra*; the Vedic term, *rājanya*, has virtually disappeared. The apparently limited mention of *kṣatriyas* in a work predominantly about regal and martial values is because the major figures are normally referred to as kings and princes, and discussion of their rights and duties is in terms of their family traditions and a king's obligations and not, until the later stages, in terms of *kṣatradharma*. Members of the third *varṇa* are virtually only called *vaiśya*; the sole exception in the text is late in the third stage (*vanigjana* at 1.1.79, the *phalaśruti* at the end of this opening *sarga*), although in the fourth stage *viś* occurs sporadically. The *vaiśyas* are mentioned only in lists of the *varṇas* or the equivalent in the second and later stages (e.g. 3.13.29–30 and 7.65.18–21), with one exception, which occurs in one of the two episodes involving low-caste ascetics. In the story of an ascetic youth killed by Daśaratha (2.57–58), the youth's birth from a *vaiśya* father and a *sūdra* mother (2.57.37) in no way disqualifies him from practising asceticism, but for Daśaratha to kill him, even accidentally, is so serious a fault that it accounts for Dásaratha's present misfortune in having to exile Rāma. In the *Uttarakānda*, on the other hand, for a *sūdra* to practise asceticism brings disaster on society, and it is necessary and indeed praiseworthy for Rāma to execute the culprit, Śambuka (7.67, cf. 7.65 and Mbh. 12.149.61–63). The enormous shift in attitudes and the increase in rigidity of the *varṇa* system is quite remarkable.

This shift under the influence of the brāhmaṇa values which are dominant from the third stage onwards is well illustrated by the legend

⁴⁰ The only other occurrence of the term *candāla* in the text outside the Triśanku episode at 1.57–58 is at 3.54.18d (but it also occurs in * passages, e.g. 6.1584* 3, 4).

of Triśanku, cursed by Vasiṣṭha's sons to become a *candāla*, with a dark and rough appearance, wearing dark clothes and unkempt hair, his garlands and cosmetics coming from the cremation ground, and his ornaments made of iron (1.57.9); the story as a whole is, of course, intended to illustrate the absolute power of the sage Viśvāmitra. By contrast, in the first stage a more liberal attitude is shown by Rāma's friendly encounter with the tribal Śabarī ascetic (3.70.6–9), which reveals a completely different attitude from the Śambūka episode, both of which have been commented on by Dhairyabala Vora.⁴¹

There are few references to the four stages of life with which the four *varṇas* are so regularly linked in the *dharmaśāstras* as the *varṇāśramadharma*. The only reference in the text to the grouping comes from the second stage, when Bharata refers first to the duty of protecting the four *varṇas* and then says that the householder's stage is the best of the four stages of life (2.98.57–58). Otherwise, there are a few references to the studentship period—for example when Sītā rather inappropriately declares that she will enjoy herself with Rāma in the forest as a *brahmacāriṇī* (2.24.10) or when others refer to *brahmacarya* in relation to Rāma's exile (2.46.10a, 76.10a and 5.33.12b, also e.g. 6 App. 30.48)—but there are several references to individuals being or becoming ascetics. Indeed, ascetics participate in the action to a considerable extent but it is clear from their portrayal that they are *vānaprasthas* rather than *saṃnyāsins*, since they maintain their sacred fires and perform sacrifice.⁴²

Family relationships are significant at all stages of the text but, whereas in the early stages the attitude is implicit, the later stages emphasise them with detailed genealogies and the like.⁴³ The basic narrative of the *Rāmāyaṇa* is concerned just with the royal family across two generations and, unlike the *Mahābhārata*, it does not trace its problems any further back or forward in the first stage, although already in the second stage the Ikṣvāku genealogy is included at 2.102. In the third stage, the horizons are wider and the narrative now includes Rāma's sons, Kuśa and Lava (1.3 and 7.58, 84–86 and 97), Rāma's ancestor Sagara and his sons (1.5 and 37–40), Sītā's adoptive father (1.49 and 65), Sītā's former incarnation as Vedavatī (7.17) and so on. The terms for relations are frequent but some interesting

⁴¹ Vora 1959: 165–66.

⁴² Ascetics and asceticism will be treated more fully in the next chapter on religious aspects.

⁴³ An interesting study is that by N. K. Wagle (1974).

shifts of vocabulary occur. The standard term for the father is *pitr* but *tāta* is also quite common, mainly in the second stage; similarly, mother is usually *mātr* but also occasionally *jananī* at all stages and *ambā* mainly in later stages. The commonest term for sons and daughters is *putra/putrī* which is about twice as frequent as *suta/sutā* (which is, however, more frequent than *putra* in verses in longer metre and in general increases in frequency in the second and third stages), while less frequent terms are *ātmaja*, *apatyā*, *tanaya* and *prasava*; the gender specific terms *duhitr* and *sūnu* are rare (and *tanūja*, *dāraka* and *putraka* rarer still). Whereas *bhaginī* has effectively replaced *svasṛ* as the standard term for sister, *bhrātṛ* remains the standard term for brother and the more specific terms, *agraja*, *anuja*, *avaraja*, *pūrvaja* and *vaimātra*, are much less common. The relatively infrequent mention of daughters or sisters in the earlier stages is probably due to the nature of the plot; certainly there is no real trace of the ideas that daughters are a burden to the family until the third stage, when for example Sumālin tells his daughter that to be the father of a girl is a misery for anyone with pride because of uncertainties over her marriage (7.9.6–7).

Individuals should obey and respect their parents—a virtue regularly alluded to and used as the standard against which to judge other loyalties. This respect is shown by Rāma and his brothers to all of Daśaratha's wives, who are equally called their mothers, and by Sītā towards her parents-in-law. The term generally used for the household is *grha*, which strictly denotes the physical structure but often designates the community inhabiting it, including regularly the servants. Another term used both for the nuclear family and the extended family unit is *kula*, which is somewhat commoner in the second stage and mention of which is often in terms of relative status, a high or a low *kula*; the patrilineal nature of the family is clear from the way the term is used, as well as from other evidence. The terms for relatives found in the text are *bāndhava*, *bandhu* and *jñāti*; on rather inadequate evidence, Wagle suggests that *bandhu* refers to agnates, *bāndhava* to cognates, and *jñāti* to the extended kin group.⁴⁴ The term *jñāti* is much more frequent in the first stage than elsewhere, whereas both *bāndhava* and the less frequent *bandhu* have a higher proportion of occurrences in the third stage; the terms are probably synonyms with a complementary distribution, as seems to be the case in the *Mahābhārata* too.

⁴⁴ Wagle 1974: 25–31 and 35–38.

Affection and closeness mark the relationships between the four brothers, the only exception—apparent rather than real—is Lakṣmaṇa’s anger against Bharata for taking Rāma’s place, for he is soon pacified by Rāma (2.18). Lakṣmaṇa’s devotion to Rāma contains a strong element of deference to the elder but the affection is mutual. So too, Rāma’s selflessness in declaring that he would willingly give everything to Bharata of his own accord (2.16.33) is matched by Bharata’s efforts to persuade Rāma to take back the throne (2.97–98). Goldman has emphasised the psychological aspects of the complementarity between Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa—the ‘composite hero’ as he terms them—seeing Lakṣmaṇa as expressing the aggression and sexuality that Rāma cannot display, with a parallel distinction in the characters of Bharata and Śatrughna.⁴⁵ Such factors are operative but so also are purely narrative ones, as well as traditional roles within the Indian family.

The harmony between Rāma and his brothers is, though, in marked contrast to the fraternal bitterness among the Vānaras and the Rākṣasas. Vālin and Sugrīva are represented as fiercely jealous and fully prepared to use force against each other, although to some extent Sugrīva is shown as being the innocent victim of Vālin’s suspicious nature, while relations among the Rākṣasas are little different. Śūrpāṇakhā harshly castigates Rāvaṇa’s competence as a ruler when she reports the defeat of the Rākṣasas in Daṇḍaka (3.31) and Rāvaṇa, as he rejects Vibhīṣaṇa’s advice to return Sītā, has equally strong words about relatives (*jñāti*) as a source of danger (6.10.1–11), while later, when Kumbhakarṇa is woken to help in the battle, he berates Rāvaṇa for his lack of political astuteness and Rāvaṇa criticises his supposed lack of affection (6.51.1–26). More generally, the enmity between the Vānara brothers, Vālin and Sugrīva, is matched by the breach between Rāvaṇa and Vibhīṣaṇa, while Rāma sides in each case with one brother and performs the *abhiṣeka* that installs him as the rightful ruler. Masson makes the point that Rāma sides with Sugrīva very impetuously on the basis of their common loss (which is, however, only implied in the text, though made explicit in 4 App. 4).⁴⁶ However, there are differences between the two situations: the quarrel between Vālin and Sugrīva dates from before Rāma’s arrival and

⁴⁵ Goldman 1980, cf. Goldman 1978, which tends to assimilate all hierarchical relationships in the epics to the Oedipal triangle.

⁴⁶ Masson 1975. Masson also emphasises Sugrīva’s fear of Vālin and regards it as paranoia, suggesting that he is acting out a fratricidal phantasy; this seems less helpful.

the ethics of it are not clearcut in its oldest form, whereas the split between Rāvaṇa and Vibhīṣaṇa is shown as arising from the moral issue of Rāvaṇa's seizure of Sītā (and to a lesser extent the political issue of the wisdom of opposing Rāma and his allies). Probably the parallelism between the Vānara and Rākṣasa brothers is not so much a commentary on different patterns of family relationships as an expression of the contrasting attitudes to power of Rāma (and by extension his brothers) and other rulers.

The same sort of contrast between hero and villain is clearly visible in relationships between husband and wife. Whereas Rāma is consistently presented as an ideal example of conjugal fidelity, Rāvaṇa is just as consistently portrayed as a paradigm of licentiousness, and to a lesser degree all the other characters have their weaknesses. The mutual affection and companionship of Rāma and Sītā is clear throughout the narrative but tends to be more explicitly presented from the second stage onwards, for example, when Rāma encamped before Lankā expresses his ardent longing for Sītā (6.5.4–20); Rāma's cold rejection of Sītā after the defeat of Rāvaṇa (6.103) is thus totally out of character with the rest of the narrative. In general, and particularly in the later stages, the emphasis is placed on a wife's devotion and subservience to her husband. Sally Sutherland argues that in some episodes Sītā acts in ways that belie the idealised descriptions of her, for example in her demands that Rāma pursue the golden deer and her castigation of Lakṣmaṇa soon afterwards, a view which takes insufficient account both of the development of the text, and of literary factors.⁴⁷ Mary Brockington sees these apparent anomalies as part of the author's solution to the complex narrative problems posed by his choice of subject.⁴⁸ Incidentally, there is no sign of the later taboo on a wife's mentioning her husband's name, since Sītā does so frequently (for example, throughout 3.47, in her reproof of Rāvaṇa, and 5.31, her conversation with Hanumān). There are two main ways in which the wife's subservience is emphasised, either by stereotyped statements that a husband is his wife's deity or by comparison with various mythical models, such as Rohinī and Sāvitrī.

However, another common aspect of a wife's duty to her husband, that of providing him with children, is remarkable for its rarity in the *Rāmāyaṇa*. Most references to marriage as an institution are in

⁴⁷ Sutherland 1989.

⁴⁸ Mary Brockington 1997.

fact to be found in the third stage, although the attitudes revealed there are not altogether consistent. For example, although the age of marriage seems to be older in the earliest passages than in the later ones, some passages in the *Uttarakāṇḍa* suggest adult marriage, most probably because they are simply reproducing older material. The well known and much discussed question of Rāma's and Sītā's ages at marriage has assumed an importance that is out of all proportion to its real significance.⁴⁹ Basically the original poet and his audience had little interest in niceties of chronology and the general impression conveyed is that Rāma and Sītā were adult or nearly so at marriage and at the time of exile, which were not far apart. References to Rāma as fifteen when he goes off with Viśvāmitra (3.36.6a, also 1.19.2a) and as seventeen on the eve of installation (2.17.26) are probably additions in the second stage to render this precise, although the statement that Rāma was seventeen at the time of the intended installation could be original.

Whatever the age of marriage, the initiative was normally with the fathers and quite often the contest for the bride's hand, which is what in practice the *swayamvara* 'self-choice' was, is the preferred method of selecting a suitably outstanding bridegroom. However, any details concerning the marriage ceremony and related matters, such as a dowry or bride-price, are confined in effect to the details of the multiple wedding of Rāma and his brothers with Sītā, her sister and her cousins, which belongs to the third stage of growth (1.71–72). The woman's position once married was not only one of subservience to her husband but also one of some insecurity through the possibility or often the reality of competition from other wives, since polygamy seems to have been normal for rulers. This was indeed institutionalised in the *aśvamedha*, which is performed by Daśaratha in the *Bālakāṇḍa* (1.13.27–28), and it is vividly illustrated by Daśaratha's reaction of abandoning Kaikeyī as soon as he has kept his promise (2.12.11 and 37.6–9), while Rāma's declaration that he can find another wife like Sītā but not another brother (6.39.5–6, cf. 796* and 2029* 5–6) presupposes the ease with which the man can make successive or multiple marriages. Tension and conflict within such a

⁴⁹ For a more detailed discussion of the data and references to secondary literature see Brockington 1984: 168–69. To the secondary literature may now be added the detailed discussion (1986) by Sheldon Pollock in his notes on 2.17.26 (*Rāmāyaṇa* 1984; II, 358–60).

polygamous household were clearly regarded as a common occurrence, a fact that is made use of in the plot. Mantharā excites Kaikeyī's fears by suggesting how her situation will change if she is no longer the favourite of the reigning king but only a step-mother (2.8.17+26) and Rāma subsequently envisages tensions between Kaikeyī and the other wives (2.47.15–16); as Sutherland rightly suggests, the author is here using Mantharā to give voice to the emotions that Kaikeyī should not express directly, since the royal family is expected to be free of negative attributes (which also facilitates her partial rehabilitation later).⁵⁰ The separate establishments or residences of the queens, indicated in various ways in the text, were no doubt in part a means to reduce such problems, while another approach to it was the strong emphasis on seniority among the queens. By contrast, Rāma and Sītā are regularly described as devoted to each other and in the third stage it is explicitly declared that Rāma did not take another wife after banishing Sītā, using a golden statue as substitute in his sacrifices (7.89.4), thus definitely establishing the union as monogamous. However, the evidence from the first and second stages is not clearcut on this matter.

Adultery is condemned, particularly in later stages, both explicitly and in some of the episodes of the story, such as the story of Ahalyā (1.47–48 and 7.30), although there are others, such as Vālin's and Sugrīva's behaviour towards each other's wives, where there are signs of a shift of attitudes from ready acceptance of the situation in the first stage to increasing condemnation later. Equally, emphasis on measures to guard a wife's chastity is prominent from the second stage onwards. The practice of *niyoga* is absent from the main plot and probably from the epic as a whole, in contrast to its prominence in the *Mahābhārata*. Possible instances have been adduced but they are more convincingly explained in other ways; thus, Guruge notes rather hesitantly that Hanumān is called the *kṣetraja* son of Kesarin (5.33.85ab, also 4.1356* 7) and Goldman speculates that it may underlie Rāyaśringa's role in the birth of Daśaratha's sons.⁵¹

The growing strictness with regard to sexual morality is reflected in the steady trend away from women's participation in public life to their almost complete seclusion within the home and especially the inner apartment of the king's palace. The narrative suggests that

⁵⁰ Sutherland 1992.

⁵¹ Guruge 1991: 201 and *Rāmāyana* 1984–: I, 19 n. 16.

seclusion was by no means regular at the earliest period; for example, Sītā is able to accompany Rāma to the forest without problems and drives openly through the city as they leave, and Daśaratha's widows go out with Bharata to persuade Rāma to return (2.77.6) and again to greet him on his triumphant return (6.115.10). Equally, however, the frequency of mention of the *antahpura* (around fifty times in the *Ayodhyā* to *Yuddha kāṇḍas*) indicates a measure of segregation, though not necessarily of rigid seclusion; it is relevant to note that, in all the detail about Daśaratha's palace, there is just one reference to a superintendent of women (*stryadhyakṣa*, 2.14.3d) and that eunuchs as guards appear only late in the third stage (7.99.10) whereas by the fourth stage there are several references to superintendents of women in Vibhīṣaṇa's palace. Reference to menstrual impurity occurs just once in the third stage—in marked contrast to its frequency of mention in the *Mahābhārata*—in the myth which derives it from one quarter of the guilt of Indra's brahmanicide (7.77.14, cf. Mbh. 5.13.17); similarly, it is Indra who disregards the proper times for intercourse in his adultery with Ahalyā (1.47.18, cf. the inclusion of this in Kausalyā's curse at 2.1802* 9–10).

Other roles for women include those of ascetic and prostitute. Many of the women who are mentioned at various *āśramas* are the wives of male ascetics (forming another indicator that they are *vānaprasthas*), even in the *Uttarakāṇḍa* (7.82.13), and there is no lack of welcome for Sītā herself as the exiles visit various *āśramas*, but in addition there are individual female ascetics, most notably Śabarī (3.70) but also for example Atri's wife Anasūyā (2.109), Svayamprabhā (4.50) and even Vedavatī (7.17). However, more typically for the third stage, the female ascetics at Vālmīki's *āśrama* live near the main hermitage, presumably therefore in separate quarters (7.48.11+14), and the traditional mythological role of women as temptresses who distract ascetics comes to the fore in the stories of R̥ṣyaśṛṅga (1.9), Pulastyā (7.2.7–9) and Viśvāmitra tempted by the *apsaras* Rambhā (1.63). The women who tempt R̥ṣyaśṛṅga are identified as prostitutes in the *Bālakāṇḍa* version of this legend and there are references to the presence of prostitutes in the streets on various festival occasions (especially in the fourth stage); since the concept of prostitutes as auspicious seems to be an early feature of Indian culture, the relative lateness of the *Rāmāyaṇa* references is noteworthy.

The fact that Daśaratha's widows play a definite part in the celebration of Rāma's return is one of the indications that widows were

not regarded as inauspicious in the earlier parts of the text, although in the fourth stage it is stated that widowhood is the greatest calamity that can befall a woman (7.514*); another indication is that terms for widows and widowhood (*vidhavā* and *vaidhavya*) are much commoner in the first stage than later. Similarly, the first reference to a widow burning herself on her husband's pyre is no earlier than the third stage (7.17.13) and there is no hint of it as Sītā, Tārā and Mandodarī mourn the supposed or actual deaths of their husbands; indeed, there are indications that the practice of *niyoga*, remarriage with the brother-in-law, was still current, since it forms the basis of some of Sītā's harsh words to Lakṣmaṇa when Mārīca has decoyed Rāma away (3.43.21–23), as well as actually happening when Sugrīva takes over Vālin's widow Tārā and Vibhīṣaṇa inherits Rāvaṇa's harem. The last two examples probably illustrate the aspect of providing a guardian for the woman, which is another function of *niyoga* in addition to the need to produce a son on behalf of the dead husband. The need for women to be protected and their lack of independence is mentioned on various occasions (for example, 2.47.3–4, 55.18, 94.42 and 3.48.5–7) and is related to the concept of their inviolability, which is several times interpreted only as stopping short of killing (for example, Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa disfiguring Śūrpāṇakhā, 3.17.17–22, cf. 32.11).

Comparatively little attention is paid to funeral rituals in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, which in general contains even less information than the *Mahābhārata*, although Guruge has made a brief survey of the data.⁵² The main exception is that Daśaratha's funeral is quite elaborately described (2.70), including the unusual information that his body was placed in a vat of sesame oil because the ministers were reluctant to perform the cremation in the absence of a son (2.60.12–13).⁵³ Daśaratha's Vedic fires were carried by his priests before the corpse, the dead body was placed on a palanquin or bier (*sibikā*) carried by his servants, and gold coins and clothes were scattered on the road in front of the bier (2.70.13–15). The funeral pyre was made of sandal-wood, *aguru* and fragrant resins, with *sarala*, *padmaka* and *devadāru* wood, and various fragrant substances were heaped on it (16–17). Then Daśaratha's body was placed on the pyre, the priests made offerings

⁵² Guruge 1991: 294–99.

⁵³ The use of oil to preserve a body temporarily is known to the *Śrautasūtras*, since two of them prescribe that an *āhitāgni* who has died away from home should be placed in a vat of oil and brought home in a cart (*Satyāśādhaśrautasūtra* 24.4.29 and *Vaikhānasaśrautasūtra* 31.23).

and chanted from the *Sāmaveda*, while Kausalyā and the other women followed the corpse in *sibikās* and other conveyances, according to their status (17–19), and afterwards went to the Sarayū to make the water offering (22–23).⁵⁴ On the twelfth day after his death, gifts of jewels, of hundreds of cows, wealth, food in abundance and vehicles, of male and female slaves and of spacious houses were made to brāhmans (the *dakṣinā* of the *śrāddha*, 71.1–3). There is only a limited amount of detail about the cremations of Jaṭāyus (3.64) and of Kabandha (3.67–68) by Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa; for Jaṭāyus they collect wood and burn the body on a pyre, kill some deer and spread their flesh on the grass for the bird, Rāma mutters the ‘going to heaven’ formula (*svargagamanam . . . jajāpa ha*, 3.64.34cd) and finally they both go to the Godāvarī to make the water offering (*udakam cakratus tasmai*, 35c); for Kabandha they gather dry branches from the forest to cremate him in a pit according to rule (*yathāvidhi*, 3.67.28d, and *nyāyena*, 29b). The informality of both procedures is only modified by the emphasis on the due ritual in the second. There are also two accounts in the *Aranyakāṇḍa* of ascetics ending their lives by entering the fire, which Śarabhaṅga additionally describes as abandoning his limbs (*yāvaj jahāmi gātrāni*, 3.4.31c) and Śabarī as sacrificing herself (*hutvātmānam hutāśane*, 3.70.26b), but otherwise neither account contains any ritual details and both are extremely brief (3.4.31–35 and 70.24–27). What is worth remarking is that both envisage as natural that ascetics should be cremated rather than be buried in *saṃādhi* (although the account of Śabarī’s death ends with her going to the place where accomplished sages sport *ātmasamādhinā*, 3.70.27), in contrast to the episode in the late *Mahābhārata* (15.33.30–32) where a heavenly voice forbids Vidura’s cremation. Guruge suggests that Rāma’s use of the proverbial saying that even carnivores do not eat the corpses of ingrates (*tān mṛtān api kravyādāḥ kṛtaghnān nopalbhūñjate*, 4.29.40cd) may allude to the exposure of the dead but the point of the hyperbole is actually rather different.

The narrative of Vālin’s cremation (4.24.13–42) is somewhat longer than most but there is no more detail, except that the wood for the pyre includes sandalwood and that the pyre is built beside the river; there is the same emphasis on following the prescriptions (*vidhipūrvam*,

⁵⁴ This is the account in the Southern recension, followed by the Critical Edition; the Northern recension has a more elaborate version in 2.1812*, which includes considerably more ritual detail, given by Guruge (1991: 297–98).

4.24.42b) and the ritual concludes with the water offering. Later, Rāma instructs Vibhīṣaṇa to perform the rituals for Rāvaṇa, despite some initial reluctance on Vibhīṣaṇa's part (6.99.30–42—significantly briefer than Mandodari's lament at verses 1–29); however, the passage is primarily about the ethics of doing so and performing the appropriate ritual and offering water are the only acts mentioned (41–42, expanded however in 3144*, 3145* and App. 69). By contrast Virādha, as he lies dying, suggests that it is the custom for Rāksasas to be buried and so he is unceremoniously thrown into a pit (3.3.23–26).

Formal education is, not surprisingly given the concerns of the epics, little mentioned in the *Ayodhyā* to *Yuddha kāṇḍas*, any more than in the narrative parts of the *Mahābhārata*, but by the third stage the account of Rāma's youth in the *Bālakāṇḍa* includes somewhat more information and in general the third and later stages contain many more allusions to teachers and pupils. At the beginning of the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* Rāma is described as having conversations with learned and respectable elders in the intervals of his weapon-training (2.1.17) and as the best of those skilled in archery (*dhanurvedavidāṁ śreṣṭhah*, 2.1.23c); later, Hanumān describes him as trained in royal learning and knowing the *Yajurveda* and the *dhanurveda* (5.33.13–14). The term *dhanurveda* in itself suggests that for *kṣatriyas* their field of learning is weaponry, just as the Vedas are for brāhmans, and its linking with the *Yajurveda* may be due to the more ritualistic emphasis of that Veda in the context of a king's residual sacrificial duties. This is the term used even as late as Nārada's opening definition of Rāma as the ideal hero who 'upholds tradition, knows the truth of Vedas and Vedāṅgas and is skilled in the lore of archery' (1.1.13). However, the narrative jumps from the birth of the four brothers to the arrival of Viśvāmitra in a single *sarga* (1.17), passing over all of Rāma's childhood and education, since Viśvāmitra's claiming of Rāma to help him in effect marks the start of Rāma's manhood, although Viśvāmitra does give Rāma some further instruction in the next few chapters, as well as presenting him with divine weapons and instructing him in their use (1.26–27). There is indeed a marked contrast between the text, in which the brothers are just described as Veda-knowing heroes endowed with knowledge and good qualities (1.19.14), and the fourth stage, which adds many more explicit details about their accomplishments (1.511* and 513*). There is correspondingly much less emphasis on the teacher than in much Sanskrit literature; of the

two main terms, *ācārya* occurs mainly in the first stage and the commoner *upādhyāya* mainly in the third (although both together occur little more than thirty times in the text), while *guru*, as in other older literature, means any respected senior and can indeed be used to describe rather than to designate a teacher (for example, 2.103.2–3 and 6.20.7).

Despite lack of mention of the learning process, it is clear that various practical forms of learning were well developed. For example, there are a number of allusions drawn from the field of medicine, especially in the context of the battles, and the care of animals is referred to incidentally from time to time. The description of the building of the altar for Daśaratha's sacrifice includes a number of terms from geometry (1.13). The number of similes involving the stars and planets in all stages reveals a general acquaintance with some basic astronomy, although more detailed references come from the second stage or later, such as that to the sun shifting south in winter (3.15.8) or a long list of asterisms in similes (5.55.1–4); however, astrology as a means of prediction is typical of the fourth and fifth stages (most notably Rāma's horoscope at 1.506*, that for his brothers at 1.508*, and the auspicious moment for Rāma's return to Ayodhyā at 6.3430*), although there is some evidence for it in connection with Rāma's proposed installation in the opening *sargas* of the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa*, which are basically from the second stage (2.3.3, 24, 4.21 and 23.8).⁵⁵ Both horoscopes include alongside the older *nakṣatra* system mention of the zodiacal signs first borrowed from the Greeks of Alexandria in the middle of the 2nd century A.D.⁵⁶

Music and dance are alluded to in all stages as part of city life or, in later stages, of any festive occasion, but the frequency of reference increases steadily through the stages. Terms for musical instruments are not at all common, although references to singing are a little more frequent; half the instruments named are drums or related percussion instruments (*dundubhi*, *bherī* and *myrdaṅga* being the earliest terms) but the commonest single instrument is the conch (*śaṅkha*) and

⁵⁵ P. V. Kane (1951) and K. Ferrari d'Occhieppo (1979) have examined Rāma's horoscope, the latter computing its date as, in order of descending probability, 11th March 200 A.D., 16th March 745 A.D. and 4th April 110 B.C.

⁵⁶ David Pingree (1978: II,196–98) stresses the link with Alexandria and rejects the possibility of the zodiac being used in India before the date noted; he also notes the implausibility of five planets in their exaltations as given in Rāma's horoscope (II,268–69).

the *vīṇā* is little mentioned. Actors (*naṭa*, *śailūṣa*) are occasionally mentioned, usually in association with dancers (*nartaka*), and there is no indication that anything at all sophisticated is intended by any reference in the text, although it is clear that from the second stage onwards actors and dancers were a common feature of urban life, at least on festive occasions, while by the fourth stage the theatrical stage (*raīga*) is mentioned occasionally. However, there is no trace until the fourth stage of boxers (*malla*) nor of their linking with actors and dancers found in the *Mahābhārata*. In general, allusions to entertainment other than music are less developed than in the *Mahābhārata*.

Writing, though probably known, was not used to any significant extent for communication. The few references in the text all involve marking objects with a name, not writing documents of any kind. The best known are the two allusions to the ring marked with his name which Rāma gives to Hanumān as a token for Sītā (4.43.11 and 5.34.2), which Sankalia identifies as a definite signet-ring; accordingly, he places the episode after the introduction of such rings through the Indo-Greeks around 100 B.C.⁵⁷ These allusions and a couple of references to arrows marked with names (5.19.21cd and 6.52.25d) appear to belong to the first stage of growth, for which such a dating is implausible. However, whereas the ring motif itself is integral to the plot, as Sankalia correctly maintains, the inscribing of it is not as firmly so linked; certainly, in the corresponding episode where Sītā gives Hanumān a jewel from her hair (*cūḍāmani*, 5.36.52) as a token to take back to Rāma, it is clearly the individuality of the piece that authenticates it. On the other hand, messages are always delivered orally, for example by the messengers sent to bring Bharata back to Ayodhyā (2.64.2), by Lakṣmaṇa giving Rāma's ultimatum to Sugrīva (4.29.50 etc.) and by the various embassies sent to Rāvaṇa. Indeed, the first references to reading or writing come from late in the third stage, where Kuśa and Lava's recitation of the *Rāmāyāna* is called a novel form of composition (*pathyajāti*, 7.85.2c) and where the *phalaśṛuti* which concludes the opening *adhyāya* of the *Bālakāṇḍa* refers to anyone reading it aloud (1.1.77–79). Harry Falk has reviewed all earlier discussion of writing in relation to the *Rāmāyāna* and indicates that *path* denotes recitation rather than necessarily reading.⁵⁸ However, in these two passages (and in other *phalaśṛutis*

⁵⁷ Sankalia 1973a: 55–56.

⁵⁸ Falk 1993: 269–70.

from the fourth stage) this verb does seem to imply reading from a text, even if that reading is a public recitation; if it does not, then references to writing are later still, not being attested until the fourth stage. Presumably the *Rāmāyaṇa* belongs in origin to a period well before the use of writing was general, as its own oral nature to some extent suggests. Interestingly, the *Rāmāyaṇa* contains what is probably the earliest use of the term *samskr̥ta* to denote the language, when Hanumān is deliberating about how to address Sītā to avoid alarming her (5.28.17–19), as both George Cardona and Pierre-Sylvain Filliozat have accepted, although this has been challenged by Clifford Wright, who takes it to mean simply appropriate discourse.⁵⁹

Unlike the *Mahābhārata*, the *Rāmāyaṇa* does not show nearly as much acquaintance with other types of literature, apart from the Vedas. It contains nothing really comparable to the lengthy didactic parts of the *Mahābhārata* which have connections with the *dharmaśāstras*—the term *dharmaśāstra* occurs just once in the text at 2.94.33a—nor to its lengthy discourses on ethics and philosophy. The nearest approach is Jābālī’s use of materialist arguments in an attempt to persuade Rāma to return and Rāma’s firm reply (2.100–01, added to in 2241*).⁶⁰ Some other passages have been expanded or added to provide moral justification but this is not couched in the technical language either of ethics or legal theory. There are a number of allusions to folk-tales or other traditional stories, such as those of the crow and the palm tree (3.39.16), the elephant’s opinion of the dangers from relatives (6.10.6–7), or the tiger and the bear (6.101.34), but these are alluded to and not narrated. The late Niśākara episode contains one passage of Purāṇa-style prophecy (4.61) and actually uses the term (4.61.3a), but when the *sūta* Sumantra is described as *purāṇavid*, ‘knowing ancient matters’ (2.13.17b and 14.1d) elsewhere in the second stage, the reference need not be to the extant Purāṇas. However, issues of ethics and philosophy, as well as similarities to the Purāṇas, belong to the religious aspects which form the subject matter of the next chapter.

⁵⁹ Cardona 1988: 647; Filliozat, P.-S. 1988: 5; Wright 1990.

⁶⁰ The term *nāstika* is found occasionally (1.6.8d, 14a, 2.61.22b, 4.17.32c, 40.30b and 2.2241* 2, 13, 24, and rarely also *nāstikya* (2.94.56a and 2240* 4).

CHAPTER NINE

THE *RĀMĀYANA* (3)

In the *Rāmāyana* we see a basically similar religious pattern in the *Ayodhyā* to *Yuddha kāṇḍas* to that found in the older parts of the *Mahābhārata*.¹ However, there is nothing corresponding to the material of the *Śānti* and *Anuśāsana parvans* with their pronouncements on ethical and social issues, discourses on Sāṃkhya and Yoga, and so on, nor is there any passage of religious teaching to match the *Bhagavadgītā*, the *Sanatsujātiya* or other such passages; in consequence, this chapter is considerably shorter than the equivalent one on the *Mahābhārata*, chapter 5. In brief, while the basic pattern is similar in both epics, there is considerable divergence in the developments, which in the *Mahābhārata* consist in the main of material added as digressions from or excursions within the main narrative but in the *Rāmāyana* see a development in the understanding of the character of Rāma to the point where ultimately he is recognised as an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu. The complete books added to each epic exemplify this well. The *Śānti* and *Anuśāsana parvans* contain a rich variety of didactic material, connected to the main narrative only by the device of their being uttered by the dying Bhīṣma. The *Bāla* and *Uttara kāṇḍas*, though added partly at least in order to give expression to the new understanding of Rāma, extend the story backwards and forwards in time, retaining the basic narrative structure.

The earliest pantheon

In general, mention of the gods becomes more frequent in the later parts of the text, which is itself an indication of the way in which religious influences increasingly make themselves felt. Considerably more than half of the thousand or so occurrences in the text of terms for the gods are found in the third stage, more than twice as many

¹ For further details of the material contained in this chapter, where not otherwise indicated, see Brockington 1984: 194–224, also Brockington 1976 and 1977b.

as in the second stage and considerably more than three times as many as in the first (and proportionately to length the discrepancy is larger still). However, the difference is not as extreme with the two most frequently occurring terms, *deva* and *sura*, which are found commonly in the first stage, whereas all other terms are both less common and mainly found in the later stages; these terms, in diminishing order of frequency are: *devatā*, *amara*, *daiwata*, *tridaśa*, *vibudha* and *divaukas*. The deities mentioned at all frequently are Agni, the Aśvins, Indra, Kandarpa, Kubera, Garuḍa, Parjanya, Bṛhaspati, Brahmā, the Maruts, Yama, Lakṣmī, Varuṇa, Vāyu, Viśvakarman, Viṣṇu, Śiva and Soma, with Indra and Yama occurring most often, followed by Brahmā, Garuḍa, Viṣṇu, Varuṇa and Vāyu. Both the deities mentioned and their relative frequency are closer to the Vedic pantheon on the whole than to classical Hinduism, for example in the continued presence of the Aśvins, Parjanya and Varuṇa and in the prominence of Indra.

Indra is normally the most active and influential of the gods and their leader against the Asuras in the first stage, while his victory over Vṛtra is frequently alluded to. Although Jacobi perhaps went too far when he proposed an identification of Rāma with Indra, Rāma is certainly often compared to Indra, and Sītā is occasionally therefore compared to Indra's consort Śacī, but no real identification is ever made.² Many of the leading figures are in fact compared with Indra, not excluding Rāvaṇa (on some ten occasions), and there are several formulaic compounds to express this idea.³ This is because basically Indra is the standard of comparison for any king, though also of *kṣatriya* as against brāhmaṇa values (for example, when Rāma replies to Sutīkṣna 'as Indra to Brahmā', 3.6.12d). It also means that Indra under his various names is as often mentioned in the first as in the second stage and, though more frequent in the third stage, his mention there does not show as marked an increase as for the gods in general. His two most frequent names are Indra and Śakra, which occur with much the same frequency in the first and second stages, whereas the less common Puram̄dara, Maghavān and Śatakratu occur mainly in the first stage, while Vāsava is fairly evenly distributed, Mahendra is more frequent in the second stage, and Sahasrākṣa increases greatly in frequency in the third stage; thus, simply in the names used, the

² See Jacobi 1893: 130–31 (discussed in chapter 2). Jacobi argued in part that, since in later Vedic literature the wife of Indra or Parjanya is called Sītā, Rāma must be a form of these gods.

³ See Brockington 1977a: 445.

shift from the Vedic to the Purānic view of Indra is apparent.⁴ Equally, the major enemies of the gods are pitted against their leader, Indra: Hiranyakasipu is Indra's opponent, his son Anuhlāda attracts Indra's wrath for deceiving Śacī, and Prahrāda is one of Indra's victims. The frequency with which Indra's banner occurs in similes suggests that it played a significant role at least in the earlier part of the *Rāmāyana* as well as of the *Mahābhārata*.⁵ Some of the similes even allude to its being taken down at the end of the festival, for example *śacīpateh ketur iotsavakṣaye* (2.68.29d, cf. 2.71.9cd; in 4.346* the date is specified as the full moon of Āsvina, *āsvayuktasamaye māsi*), while the special significance attached to the uprightness of the *indradhvaja* accounts for the stereotyped use of *utthita indradhvaja* in several of them. Just as in the *Mahābhārata* Indra's prominence and his martial nature are reflected in his being the father of Arjuna in the symbolic scheme of the five Pāṇḍavas as sons of gods, so too in the *Rāmāyana* at the climax of the whole story, in the duel with Rāvaṇa, Rāma receives the aid of Indra's charioteer (6.90–100).

Yama's prominence comes from the significance of warfare, since he basically personifies death and is not much thought about except on the field of battle. The stereotyped nature of the battle scenes means that the number of references to him perhaps outweigh his actual importance as a deity, while the frequency of *nayāmi yamasādanam* and similar formulæ suggest an older view of the after-life as located in an abode of the dead. This impression is supplemented by the fact that Daśaratha is several times referred to as having gone to heaven, *svarga*, which is as obviously the reward of the righteous (e.g. 2.109.28) as hell, *naraka* or *niraya*, is the punishment for the wicked, although how either is reached is not made clear.⁶ Even more significant is the fact that the ascetic Śabari when she enters the fire goes to heaven which is enjoyed by accomplished sages (3.70.26–27). This older pattern persists even into the third stage, where souls enjoy the fruit of their good and bad deeds in Yama's realm (7.21.10cd, much expanded in 403* and 404*) and Yama himself is called *pretarāja*

⁴ Other names used of Indra—Pākaśāsana, Śacīpati, Vajradhara, Vajrin and Sahasrakṣus—and titles such as *tradaśēvara* or *vibudhādhīpa* are infrequent and mainly late in distribution.

⁵ Such similes occur at 2.71.9, 24, 3.3.13b, 25.8d, 4.16.27d, 17.2d, 5.1.57d, 8.13d, 6.15.18c, 35.17c, 63.20a, 64.4b; their absence from the *Bāla* and *Uttara kāṇdas* is noteworthy.

⁶ However, the formula *maya pañcatvam āpanne* and its variants (2.57.24c etc.) suggests the dissolution of the elements of the body into their correlates in nature.

(7.15.17d, cf. 22.16d). His role as a *lokapāla* first occurs at the end of the *Yuddhakāṇḍa* and becomes more frequent in the fourth and fifth stages.

Though not very frequently mentioned in the first stage (only 34 times, including references to his world), Brahmā becomes prominent in the second and especially the third stages, showing an almost five-fold increase between the first and third stages; this prominence is a particularly significant feature in view of his later eclipse. The various names used, Brahmā, Svayambhū and Pitāmaha and their derivatives, show similar distributions, while Prajāpati, who usually but not invariably is identical to Brahmā, is more common in the third and later stages. He is still credited (at 2.102.2–3, although some NE manuscripts add Viṣṇu's name) with the cosmogonic exploit of taking the form of a boar in order raise the earth from the waters, as Gonda has emphasised.⁷ Mainly, however, he is the generous bestower of favours and especially weapons, which he distributes impartially as much to Rāksasas as to others; indeed, Indrajit is once described as being Svayambhū's darling (6.61.12d). The first allusion to his granting boons to Rāvaṇa, which thereby makes him the indirect instigator of the main events of the narrative, occurs in a catalogue of Rāvaṇa's exploits found in the second stage but the story is only narrated in the third and fourth stages (7.10.12–22, cf. 1.14.12–14, 4 App. 8.8 and 7 App. 1.288–348). But he does also utter curses (for example against Kumbhakarṇa at 6.48.9c and 49.23–27) and engage in other actions, fathering the Vānara Jambavat (4.40.2) and creating the aerial chariot Puṣpaka (6.115.23+29). Brahmā also leads the gods when they gather at the end of the *Yuddhakāṇḍa* to reveal Rāma's divinity to him (6.105), although in the *Rāmāyaṇa* Indra then takes over to restore the dead Vānaras to life at Rāma's request (6.108), whereas in the *Rāmopākhyāna* Brahmā does this (Mbh. 3.275.40); this is the prelude to still greater prominence in the third stage, on which more will be said below.

Garuḍa, who in later mythology figures mainly as Viṣṇu's *vāhana* or mount, appears in the *Rāmāyaṇa* both more frequently than Viṣṇu and almost entirely independently of him. His speed and his enmity to snakes are both significant features of his portrayal. Hanumān in particular but on occasion other Vānaras too are likened to him for their speed, while his intervention to rescue Rāma and Laksmaṇa

⁷ Gonda 1954: 140.

from Indrajit's wiles (6.40.33–59) clearly reflects his enmity to snakes. An obviously inserted passage of the second stage narrates his Vedic exploit of stealing the *amṛta* from Indra's palace (3.33.28–34).⁸ The comparative lack of reverence accorded to Viṣṇu is particularly marked in the earlier stages (only thirteen references in the first stage, of which the majority are in similes) but it persists even at quite late stages in the transmission of the text. A clear sign of the older pattern is seen in the similes comparing Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa to Indra and Viṣṇu respectively (for example 6.24.29d, 79.4d and 87.9d). Lakṣmī or Śrī, Viṣṇu's classical consort, appears quite often as the royal fortune or good luck in general (e.g. 2.73.15), yet she is seldom linked in any way with Viṣṇu and indeed is linked with Indra once (6.40.25); similarly, in the *Mahābhārata* a linking of Śrī with Draupadī is found, while in the *Rāmāyana* Sītā is compared to Śrī about half a dozen times in the first and second stages (without in either case implying that their husbands are Viṣṇu). Subsequently, however, Viṣṇu reaches the position of using Indra as his demiurge and, being *indrakarman*, to work through him (6.105.16); once Indra even begs vainly for Viṣṇu's aid (7.27.13–19). Viṣṇu's *avatāras* are scarcely referred to outside the *Bālakāṇḍa*; they and the aspect of Rāma's identification with Viṣṇu will be examined in detail below.

Varuṇa, as in the *Mahābhārata*, appears as a lingering survival, occurring mainly in three stereotyped aspects: in a compound likening heroes to Indra and Varuṇa, as lord of the ocean, and as the regent of the west in the formalised grouping of the deities as guardians of the directions. The term *varuṇālaya* (which is nearly half as frequent as mention of Varuṇa himself with 22 occurrences) denotes simply the sea in all but three late occurrences: in the search party accounts (4.41.24d, cf. 39cd, where his abode is the sunset mountain) and twice in the *Uttarakāṇḍa*, where Varuṇa's abode is part of the underworld.⁹ Varuṇa's noose is mentioned occasionally in the second and later stages (e.g. 4.41.39cd and 1.26.9a) but in a manner which suggests

⁸ Cf. D. M. Knipe (1966–67). Knipe also sees a reference in this passage to Garuḍa's other Vedic role as the killer of snakes.

⁹ In the first of these *Uttarakāṇḍa* passages, Rāvaṇa attacks the *lokapālas* successively, killing Yama and reaching Varuṇa's abode (7.23.45d). F. B. J. Kuiper (1979: 74–93) studies Varuṇa in the epic but erroneously places this episode after Rāvaṇa's killing by Rāma and sees it as illustrating Hopkins' statement (1915: 119) that 'a dead or defeated demon goes to Varuṇālaya as naturally as a dead man goes to Yamasādana', which is in fact based on the other instance, that of Madhu's death at 7.53.19ab.

an artificial revival rather than a genuine survival from Vedic ideas. Similarly, in the fourth stage, when roused by the sight of Urvaśī, he spills his seed in a pitcher from which Vasīṣṭha is born (7 App. 8.144–171); this passage also mentions Mitra, his Vedic companion, who only appears in the text twice, in a list of deities (6.60.7[l.v.]) and in a reference to his gaining the status of Varuṇa by performing the *rājasūya* (7.74.5). However, Janaka's bow, which is the centrepiece of Sītā's *svayamvara*, was given by Varuṇa in the second stage (2.28.12 and 110.38) rather than by Śiva as later (for example, 1.65.7–13, also 2.2392*, which replaces 2.110.38 in some NE manuscripts).

Vāyu still occurs as a symbol of power and destructiveness but his form as a deity is not distinguished from his physical basis in the wind, and a significant factor in such prominence as he has is that Hanumān is *vāyuputra* and the like (again, as with Bhīma in the *Mahābhārata*, this symbolises his enormous strength). The story of his rape of Añjanā is told in both the second and third stages (4.65.8–18 and 7.35–36), while the third stage also includes the story of his attempted seduction of Kuśanābha's daughters and his breaking of their limbs when they refuse (1.31.12–32.4). Elsewhere in the third stage he is declared in Upaniṣadic terms to be the breaths and the whole world (*vāyuh sarvam idam jagat* 7.35.61b).

Śiva is mentioned less frequently than in the *Mahābhārata*. He is not a frequent *upamāna* in similes any more than Viṣṇu is, and in general he is not frequently mentioned in the first and second stages. It is particularly significant that the term Maheśvara does not mean Śiva at 6.107.1–6, despite the relative lateness of this passage. However, Śiva is more prominent in the *Bāla* and *Uttara kāṇḍas* which will be discussed in a subsequent section.

The Asuras are portrayed in the earlier stages as opponents of the Devas and in many ways a match for them, as is clearly shown by the formulaic element *devāsure yuddhe*. Indeed, as already noted, the major named Asuras are pitted against Indra, the warrior chief of the gods. Various groups of semi-divine beings occur quite often in lists but rarely elsewhere and in general are of slight significance; the most frequent are the Gandharvas, considerably more so than the Apsarases, and from the second stage onwards individual Gandharvas and Apsarases are occasionally named (including Rambhā, whom Rāvaṇa attempts to seduce, resulting in Nalakūbara's curse on him which protects Sītā, 7.26), while in the third stage the origin of the

Apsarases from the churning of the ocean is included and they are there described as *sādhāraṇāḥ* (1.44.18–20). The Rāksasas, as was noted in chapter 4, occur frequently from the *Aranyakāṇḍa* onwards, but as participants in the action, characterised by hostility to Rāma and his allies rather than divine or demonic powers; however, in early stages there is a corresponding tendency to that by which Rāma is compared with Indra which compares them with Indra's opponents (most obviously in the name of Rāvaṇa's son, Indrajit), and the ethical polarisation in my view becomes stronger in later stages, although Pollock stresses the otherness of the Rāksasas and sees them as demons from the start.¹⁰

Ritual and other religious activity

In the first stage the commonest ritual acts to be mentioned are the morning and evening worship (*samdhyā*) but the fullest descriptions of them occur in the third stage (1.22.2–3 and 7.72.20–73.2 respectively); however, there is no mention at any stage of a midday *samdhyā*. There was still clearly no bar on women performing many rituals themselves, since Sītā is envisaged as performing the *samdhyā* when alone (5.12.48), Kausalyā performs *pūjā* to Viṣṇu and makes oblations into the fire (2.17.6–7), and Sītā worships the Gaṅgā as the exiles cross the river (2.46.67–73), while the second of these also illustrates the trend from the second stage onwards towards the more informal types of worship which may be classed as *pūjā*. Sacrifice (*yajña*, occasionally *adhvara* or *kratu*), oblations (*homa*, rarely *havis*) and the sacrificial altar (*vedi*) are all mentioned occasionally in the first stage, along with the best known of the individual sacrifices (*agnihotra*, *āśvamedha*, *rājasūya* and *vājapeya*), to which in the second stage another four are added (*agniṣṭoma*, *āgrayaṇa*, *paurnamāsi* and *paundarīka*). Similarly, the only priest mentioned in the first stage is the *purohita*, who has particularly close connections in any case with the king, but the *praśastr* and the *sadasya* are each mentioned once in the second stage. Little detail is given about performing sacrifice—usually no more than mention of the fire carrying the offering to the gods—and indeed as much is said about the very informal sacrifice of a blackbuck by Rama and Lakṣmaṇa to consecrate

¹⁰ Pollock 1985–86.

their newly built hut (2.50.15–19) as about the more formal rituals; certainly there is nothing equivalent to the detail found in the *Sānti* and *Anusāsana parvans*, apart from the description of Daśaratha's sacrifices in the *Bālakāṇḍa* (commented on further below). Rituals are also performed in the forest among the sages, who therefore, as already noted, clearly are *vānaprasthas*, although neither that nor other terms are frequent.¹¹

As Olivelle rightly stresses, *samnyāsa* and related terms do not occur in the *Rāmāyaṇa* within the context of renunciation.¹² At 3.8.25cd, *yadi rājyam hi samnyasya bhaves tvam nirato munih*, the verb occurs with the meaning of 'giving up' but even here does not denote complete renunciation, since the context is Rāma's exile, while elsewhere *samnyāsa* is used to mean 'deposit' or 'trust' (2.107.14, 2326*, 3.8.15, cf. 3.8.16,17) and once in the compound *prāṇasamnyāsa* to mean suicide (5.53.8). Olivelle contrasts the absence of *samnyāsa* as a term for renunciation in the *Rāmāyaṇa* with its frequency in the *Mahābhārata* in which it is used a total of 53 times, and concludes that it was at most a very uncommon term for renunciation at the period when the *Rāmāyaṇa* gained its present form, while suggesting that the term entered the vocabulary of renunciation around the 3rd–2nd century B.C.

Several groups of sages are mentioned, mainly from the second stage onwards, among whom the Vaikhānasas and the Vālakhilyas are the most frequent, while the general terms *rṣi* and *muni* occur throughout but are twice as frequent in the third stage as in the first and second stages. Their characteristic dress is their bark-cloth (*cīra*, also *valkala*) and Rāma and Sītā put on bark-cloth to mark their going to the forest (2.33); matted hair (*jaṭā*, *jaṭila*) and the skins worn by sages (*ajina* or *kṛṣṇajina*) are less frequently mentioned, and the water pot (*kalaśa*) even less often. From the descriptions of their *āśramas* (especially the very elaborate one at 3.1, but also for example at 2.93.33, 3.70.19, cf. Agastya's hermitage at 1.50 and Vālmīki's at 7.47–8), it is clear that the activities engaged in included both sacrifice and recitation of the Vedas, while most were inhabited by a considerable number of ascetics together. In fact, in the first and second stages, the performance of rituals is more often mentioned as an

¹¹ The terms occurring are: *parirājaka* 3.44.2d,3e, 45.1c, 47.8a, 5.32.15b), *vānaprastha* 28.58.20b, 3.5.14b, 11.24c, 5.11.40c (also 2.1103* 1, 1449* 1), *bhikṣu(ka)*/ *bhikṣū* 2.26.11c, 27.31b, 3.44.8d, 47.6b, 4.3.3b, 21a, 5.14b (also 2.755* 7, App. 2.90), and *śramaṇa*/^o*ī* 1.1.46c, 13.8d, 3.69.19c, 70.7b, 4.18.31c (also 2.873* 6, 3.1350* 1).

¹² Olivelle 1981: 267–68.

activity in hermitages than performance of austerities (usually simply termed *tapas* without specification of details), although the emphasis is reversed in the third stage; the *agnihotra* is quite often mentioned and one of the reasons for Rāma to help the ascetics is that the Rākṣasas are interrupting their rituals (3.9.11, cf. also 6.27.17–20).

In general the picture that can be derived from incidental references in the earlier stages is decidedly archaic. There is no real sign of veneration of the cow in the first stage and indeed Bharadvāja presents Rāma with a cow (2.48.16cd), which in the context most naturally means for killing according to Vedic custom, although the commentators equally naturally provide alternative explanations. However, in the second stage, Bharata's curse includes 'may he kick a sleeping cow' (2.69.15, cf. Mbh. 13.95.56 and 96.32). There are virtually no references in the text to any kind of permanent building for ritual or worship; a separate room or hut for the fire, which is mentioned three times (2.70.13b, 85.10a, 5.33.43d), belongs basically with the older pattern of ritual and nothing more than this need be meant when, as part of the preparations for his installation, Rāma worships Nārāyaṇa with oblations and then lies down with Sītā to sleep in Viṣṇu's holy sanctuary (*āyatana*, 2.6.1–4). Although Hopkins took the description of Rāvaṇa's palace as 'like the house of a god' (*devagrīhapaṇa*, 3.53.6d) as meaning a temple, the more probable meaning is that it looked like a deity's heavenly palace.¹³ However, within Rāvaṇa's ásoka grove there is a *caitya* building with a thousand pillars, a stairway of coral and a golden dais (5.13.15–17), which must be a substantial building. Both *tīrthas* and *caityas* are mentioned elsewhere occasionally, mainly in the second stage. The earlier references to *caityas* seem to be to non-brāhmaical cult spots such as a sacred tree, particularly associated with the Rākṣasas, whereas in the fourth stage (but already in the text of the *Mahābhārata*) they are quite often linked with *āyatanas* and both probably then designate some kind of building. Image worship is almost completely absent from the text, the one exception occurring in the third stage with Rāvaṇa's installation and worship of a golden *linga* (7.31.38–40), but references to images do occur in the fourth and fifth stages (for example, 6.548* 1 mentions an image trembling).

¹³ Hopkins (1915: 70–72), where he also suggests that, unlike the *Mahābhārata*, the *Rāmāyana* does mention temples and other shrines; however, the majority of the examples he cites have been relegated to * passages in the Critical Edition.

Religious and philosophical concepts

The first stage shows minimal concern for issues relating to belief or patterns of thought, but this is changing already in the second stage. Astrology and belief in omens are referred to from the second stage onwards; for example, a favourable date (2.3.4+24, also 62* 1) and favourable positions of the moon (2.4.21 and 23.8) are chosen for Rāma's installation, and Kausalyā's blessing includes invocation of all the *nakṣatras* (2.22.5), and Sītā inveighs against the astrologers who have, falsely as it seems, predicted long life for Rāma and motherhood for her (6.23.12 and 38.2–14); references become significantly more detailed in the third stage (as was shown in the previous chapter). Although various asterisms are mentioned, this is often for other reasons; for example, the commonest, Rohinī, forms a standard comparison for a favourite wife. All the planets are mentioned and descriptions of omens occasionally include the appearance of comets or meteors as a portent (e.g. 2.4.17–19), while an eclipse marks Rāvaṇa's temporary advantage over Rāma in their final duel (6.90.27–30). The cries of birds may be omens of either good or bad, but a jackal's cry is always inauspicious (e.g. 6.31.11), while the significance of the throbbing of one's arm varies between the right and the left for men and women (3.57.4 and 5.25.35–37, also 7.45.11–12). Some minor cosmogonic elements also appear in the second stage, mainly in Jaṭāyus' genealogy (3.13) but also in the Ikṣvāku genealogy (2.102, cf. 1.69.17–30), but the details given are meagre.

The concept of *samsāra* is largely ignored in the first stage, so much so that Benjamin Khan quite reasonably affirms that the *Rāmāyaṇa* lacks any unequivocal assertion of transmigration and seems completely unaware of *mokṣa*.¹⁴ As noted earlier in this chapter, in connection with Yama's prominence, the basic belief in the first stage is in some kind of other world, most often designated by the term *svarga* but also as higher worlds (cf. Rāma's words as he lights Jaṭāyus' pyre: *gaccha lokān anuttamān*, 3.64.30b) or simply as *para* (for example, in the phrase *asmiñl loke paratra ca*, 2.37.8d). This remains the pattern in the second stage also: for example, Daśaratha goes to *svarga* or *brahma-loka* (2.98.31c and 34d) and descends from Indra's world to congratulate Rāma after his victory (6.107.7–8), while in Sītā's homily to

¹⁴ Khan 1965: 121; cf. also Guruge 1991: 266–74.

Rāma the sword-wearing ascetic ends up in hell (3.8.19). The term *mokṣa* in fact occurs just four times in total in the text (3.46.23d[1.v.], 6.55.58b, 7.19.3d and 33.21d) and even so not in its religious sense, which appears only occasionally in the fourth stage (2 App. 4.30, 6.3260* 5 and 7 App. 1.127; cf. also *yatīnām iwa muktānām* at 2.1110* 1).

There are, however, substantial changes in ideas about the causes of what happens to individuals. In the first stage individuals are generally seen as responsible for their own situations and any setback is because of what they have done, by implication in this present life (e.g. 2.38.16–17, 3.47.26 and 49.26). Already by the second stage, either the concept of *karma* is seen as acting across lives or the notion of fate is invoked as an explanation. For example, Rāma surmises that in another birth his mother must have separated women from their sons for it to have happened to her (2.47.19), Hanumān declares to Tārā that everyone reaps the reward of good or evil deeds after death (4.21.2–3) and Mahodara warns Kumbhakarṇa that *karma* produces its beneficial or evil results in this world and the next (6.52.7–9). However, fate or destiny is often envisaged as a purely external force, as for example in the proverbial *kālo hi duratikramah*. The frequent use of the term *kāla* in such situations obviously points to a meaning close to fate, since it suggests that events are inevitable, whereas the other common term *daiva* perhaps points more towards the aspect of chance by invoking the intervention of the gods (e.g. 2.19.18 and 3.62.5–12).¹⁵ However, it is worth noting that the term *niyati*, which does have strongly determinist overtones, is very rare and also late (4.24.4abc, 11a and 7.94.12c). Interestingly destiny is invoked on several occasions in the *Rāmopākhyāna* when the *Rāmāyana* gives more direct motivations (for example, Sītā is prompted by destiny, *vidhicodita*, to send Rāma after the golden deer, Mbh. 3.262.17).

Another aspect of the increasing emphasis on *karma* is the development of concepts that can mitigate its rigidity. An example of this is that William Smith, studying the uses of the curse in the Rāma literature, notes that most of the curses found in the Vālmīki *Rāmāyana* occur in the *Uttarakānda* and that in the later Rāma literature the emphasis shifts further still, with curses cast on the human actors rather than on demons, which he explains as due in general to the

¹⁵ Satyavrat Sastri (1958 and 1963) discusses terms for fate and destiny in the *Rāmāyana* and the *Yogavāsiṣṭha*, while Y. Krishnan (1992) looks briefly at *karma* in both the *Rāmāyana* and the *Mahābhārata*.

need to establish moral causality, as well as being a method of dealing with the riddle of human suffering.¹⁶ However, less plausibly Robert Goldman has seen the proliferation of curses in both epics as ‘nothing but a dramatic personalization of the idea of *karma*’, illustrating this by the way that Daśaratha on his death-bed ‘suddenly recovers a painful memory from his own youth’ and questioning how he could have totally forgotten such a traumatic event until this point (which is a problem, however, only if this episode is seen as original), while also drawing attention to similarities with the *Mahābhārata* story of Pāṇḍu’s curse for killing the mating buck.¹⁷ On the other hand, Edmour Babineau argues that suffering shapes the form of the *Rāmāyaṇa* and that all its main characters are deeply branded by the experience of suffering.¹⁸ He suggests, indeed, that Daśaratha’s life was dominated by suffering, that Rāma is very much a suffering hero and that the epic clearly indicates that man suffers because he has contravened the moral code, while affirming that ‘the forces of light will ultimately prevail over the forces of darkness’. His simplistic answer is to point to the role of Brahmā as ‘Creator God’ and to Rāma as *avatāra* of Viṣṇu.

Use of the term *daiva* corresponds broadly to the concept of chance, as for example when Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa are thus directed to Kabandha (3.66.2 and 14) or it is stated that misfortunes come to all for none can escape *daiva* (3.62.5–12); this is also implied by the fact that *daiva* is unforeseeable (e.g. 2.19.18).¹⁹ In fact, despite the frequency of the term *daiva*, ‘divine <activity>’, the gods do not often intervene directly in the action, although gods, sages and minor deities not infrequently function as a kind of divine chorus or audience to the actions being performed on earth (though usually, if not invariably, as a result of later expansion). The only significant exception to this is that the gods send Indra’s charioteer Mātali to act as Rāma’s charioteer in the final battle (6.90), which is doubly significant since Indra is still the deity whose status is used to underline Rāma’s growing prestige. In general, the use of the gods as spectators to cheer Rāma on (most notably at 6.91.5–8, where also the Asuras side with Rāvaṇa) can be seen as reflecting the preliminary stages of the ethical polarisation

¹⁶ Smith 1986.

¹⁷ Goldman 1985: 421.

¹⁸ Babineau 1986. Despite its date, his study is based on the vulgate text.

¹⁹ There is an interesting discussion of the phrase *daivam acintyam* by Ludo Rocher (1977–78).

which ultimately transforms the story, along with the use of the term *nairṛta*—never common, but most frequent in the second stage—to describe the Rākṣasas as sons of Nirṛti, mentioned occasionally in Vedic literature, where she personifies disorder. It is interesting also to note that Mālyavān, after advising Rāvaṇa to adopt conciliation (6.26.6–10), goes on to say that *dharma* is the faction of the gods and *adharma* of the Rākṣasas and Asuras (6.26.11). On the other hand, Indrajit, when he adopts a hard-line attitude, suggests that family loyalties take precedence over others (*gunavān vā parajanaḥ svajano nirguṇo 'pi vā | nirgunaḥ svajanaḥ śreyān yah paraḥ para eva sah*, 6.74.15), in which Raghavan has seen a deliberate adaptation of the *Bhagavadgītā* (no doubt of 3.35, of which the first line recurs at 18.47ab).²⁰

Bimal Matilal argues, mainly on the basis of Vālin's accusations against Rāma (4.18), that the virtues expounded in the *Rāmāyāna* are purely formalistic—they depend simply on fulfilling a formal promise or a formal duty—and that the term *dharma* is to be seen as equivalent to these formalistic principles.²¹ This seems an unduly restrictive view of the nature of *dharma* in the epic. Admittedly, there are many passages where *dharma* appears simply as one member of the *trivarga*—for example, Rāma declares that it must be following *kāma* rather than *artha* and *dharma* that destroyed Daśaratha (2.47.9 and 13) and many more instances can be adduced (e.g. 2.94.53–54, 3.48.8–12, 4.24.8–19, 37.20–22, 5.49.27–28 and 6.51.9–12)—but even in these the meaning of *dharma* is often wider than this might suggest. However, a broader view of the narrative shows it as exploring—in a more positive way certainly than the *Mahābhārata*—the ramifications of the concept of *dharma* and as making both Dásaratha and Rāma at critical points place *dharma* in the sense of the wider good above personal interests. There are various pronouncements on *dharma* included in certain discourses or homilies, most notably those by Rāma to Lakṣmaṇa (2.47.9–26), by Sītā to Rāma (3.8.26–28), by Vālin to Rāma and Rāma's reply (4.17.13–44 and 18.4–39), while Lakṣmaṇa angrily questions whether there can be any justice, since the evil flourish,

²⁰ Raghavan 1970: 35: 'adapting the very words of the *Gita* on the uniqueness of Svadharma, Indrajit propounds, as it were, the religion of *Sva-jana*.' If so, this verse must be late. There are probable quotations by the fourth stage: for example, 2.1833* is very similar to BhG. 2.27. But other similarities of wording are probably coincidental, such as *anāryajuṣṭam asvargyam* at 2.76.13a, BhG. 2.2c and Mbh. 9.30.22c, and *svargadvāram apārvtam* at 6 App. 63.65 post., BhG. 2.32b and Mbh. 8 App. 14.3 post. (also minor variants elsewhere).

²¹ Matilal 1980–81.

after the apparent killing of Sītā (6.70.14–33); some comment on all of these passages has already been made in the section on the growth and development of the text in chapter 7. In addition, the concept of *satya* becomes more prominent by the second stage; indeed, Renate Söhnens-Thieme has pointed out that in both epics instances of the ‘act of truth’ occur in incidental stories or later parts, citing the ascetic boy killed by Daśaratha (who uses an ‘act of truth’ to go to heaven) and Sītā’s appeal to the earth in the *Uttarakāṇḍa*, as well as Damayantī’s two *satyakriyās* from the *Mahābhārata* story of Nala.²² But the understanding of *dharma* is not just something abstract and impersonal, for the inner struggle is always at the least hinted at. The *Rāmāyaṇa* is far more, indeed, than merely a morality tale, in which Rāma epitomises kingly virtues and Sītā those of womanhood, or else it would never have caught the imagination of generations of Indians as it has done.

In particularly striking contrast to the *Mahābhārata*, where the *Mokṣadharmaparvan* contains important material for the early history of Sāṃkhya and Yoga, there is no mention at all of either in the text of the *Rāmāyaṇa* and only a possible allusion to Sāṃkhya concepts in *pañcapañcakatattvajñāḥ* at 3.889* 2 (where most of the NE recension add a verse to Rāvaṇa’s boasting to Sītā which includes other non-Sāṃkhya numerical groups of seven sevens and eight eights). There are, however, definite references to the Nyāya and Mīmāṃsā systems in the fourth and fifth stages (7.1271* 7 and 5 App. 6.31).²³

The developed religious pattern

The ethical polarisation just mentioned becomes still more obvious in the third stage, in which also the concept of *bhakti* begins to be apparent—possibly in the opening of the *Bālakāṇḍa* with the figure of Nārada (1.1.1–2.2), who later at least is especially associated with *bhakti*, and more definitely in the ending of the *Uttarakāṇḍa* (7.98.15 and 100.15). However, it must be stressed that, as has been indicated from time to time already, older features still persist into this stage. For example, Rāma’s reward for his exemplary life is declared to be

²² Söhnens-Thieme 1995.

²³ The reference to Vibhiṣaṇa as *nyāyajño nyāyakovidāḥ* at 6.3329* 1 need not refer to the system but just to appropriate behaviour.

going to Brahmaloka (1.1.76d) and Vālmīki is promised that he will go there (1.2.36), while the few references to Dhātr occur predominantly in the third stage (1.48.14a, 2.22.2c, 86.21d, 3.11.18c, 7.20.24a, 36.1d and 47.3c). Equally, although Viṣṇu incarnates as Rāma (1.14–15) and Paraśurāma recognises him as Viṣṇu (1.75.17–20), much of the rest of the *Bālakānda* ignores his divinity. In general, in the third stage both Śiva and Viṣṇu are more prominent and appear as protectors of the other gods, who for example turn first to Śiva, but are sent on to Viṣṇu who agrees to act against Sukeśa's sons (7.6). Of the two mythical *aśvamedhas* narrated in the *Uttarakānda* one is offered to Viṣṇu by Indra (7.77) and the other is offered to Śiva (7.81).

Śiva is also a frequent granter of boons—for example, to Viśvāmitra, Devarāta, Rāvaṇa and Madhu (1.54.13–18, 1.65.7, 7.16 and 7.53.5–10). Various myths connected with Śiva are narrated or alluded to: Umā wins Śiva and this is followed by the birth of Skanda at 1.35.6–26 and 36.7–31; Viśvāmitra gained the lore of archery along with the Vedāngas and Upaniṣads from Śiva by his penances at 1.54.16; the famous bow of Janaka is now Śiva's bow at 1.65 (which includes Śiva interrupting Dakṣa's sacrifice at 1.65.9–11); his thrusting down of Kailāsa when Rāvaṇa attempts to uproot the mountain is narrated at 7.16 (which also includes mention of Nandi, otherwise found only at 3.15.39d in the text, though several times in * passages), Rāvaṇa's worship of the *linga* is described at 7.31.38–40 (with further detail added at 660*), and Rāma narrates his turning of Ila into a woman at 7.78–80 (where Śiva's turning into females of all males who enter Pārvati's presence includes even himself, 7.78.12). The last but one of these is the only reference in the text to any Śaiva cult but further indications appear in the fourth and fifth stages.

The greater prominence of both Viṣṇu and Śiva is reflected in their titles, for both are called *devadeva* and *devesa*, Śiva is called *sarvabhūtāpati* (7.53.12b) and Viṣṇu *tribhuvanaśreṣṭha* (7.76.17c).²⁴ The rise in prominence of Viṣṇu in particular (to be treated in more detail in the next section) is of course paralleled in the *Mahābhārata*, especially the *Śāntiparvan*, but does mark the most radical transformation of the two epics and of the religious pattern that they come to reflect.

²⁴ However, it should be noted that Maheśvara and Mahādeva do not mean Śiva at 6.107.1d and 9a, a passage which in many respects belongs with the third stage; the NE recension in both places reads Pitāmaha and Brahmā is in fact the most likely speaker of the intervening speech.

However, the pattern is complex. Indra still retains considerable significance, although his portrayal is now closer to that typical of the Purāṇas. Indra leads the gods in battle against Rāvaṇa (7.27–28), though first appealing to Viṣṇu as the supreme deity, but he is captured by Rāvaṇa's son (hence named Indrajit), released through Brahmā's intervention and lectured about his adultery with Ahalyā (7.29–30). There are also Purāṇic aspects to the narrative of his performance of the *śvamedha* to free himself from the guilt of *brahmahatyā* from killing Vṛtra (7.77) but his continuing prominence is underlined by Rāma, when he recalls to his brothers Sītā's restoration after the fire-ordeal, declaring that she was handed back by Mahendra (7.44.8), in a surprising variation from the account at the end of the *Yuddhakāṇḍa*, where it is appropriately Agni who returns Sītā to him (6.106.1–9).

Brahmā's greater prominence in the third stage is shown most notably when he welcomes Rāma to heaven after his eventual self-immolation (7.100.6), although he is also portrayed as a mere demiurge under Viṣṇu (7.94.7). Descriptions of Brahmā as four-faced and as born from the lotus first appear in the third stage (he is four-faced at 1.2.22c, 7.5.11a, 35.65c and 36.22c, for example, and born from the lotus at 7.30.9–10). Both Indra and Brahmā are indeed, like Viṣṇu and Śiva, called by titles such as *deveśa* and *īśāna* in the third stage. There is in fact at this stage more nearly a quartet of deities than either a trio or a pair. Indra's continuing prominence can no doubt be related to his role as the *ksatriyas'* deity, just as Brahmā's is linked to the brāhmaṇas and ascetics (for example, *brahmā brāhmaṇavatsalah*, 7.5.14d), a feature which is already apparent in occasional similes occurring in the earlier stages. This close association with particular castes may well be a major factor in the ultimate decline of both Indra and Brahmā, which has clearly progressed further in the fourth stage, although both deities still occur there; for example, Brahmā sends Indra to encourage Sītā while she is imprisoned in Lankā (3 App. 12) and Rāma narrates the myth of Brahmā issuing from the sleeping Viṣṇu (7 App. 10.88–97, cf. 7 App. 3.147).

The *Rāmāyaṇa* has on the whole much less of the narration of myths than is found in the *Mahābhārata*, until the third stage. In the *Bālakāṇḍa*, for example, in addition to the Śaiva myths mentioned above, there occur the story of Gaṅgā's origin (1.34) and her descent to earth (1.42), the churning of the ocean (1.44) and Indra's seduction of Ahalyā (1.47–8, cf. 7.30.15–41, also Mbh. 5.12.6 and 12.329.14), as well as various legends about the sages; Renate Söhn-

Thieme notes that this first explicit narrative of Indra and Ahalyā in the *Bälakānda* is relatively late, tracing it back to Brāhmaṇa references and forward to a full account in the *Brahma Purāṇa*.²⁵ A number of these myths also provide evidence of later ideas, among them Viśvāmitra's and Vasiṣṭha's quarrel over Vasiṣṭha's cow Śabalā (1.51–55), with its definite indications of veneration of the cow, and the emphasis on the purifying power of the Gāṅgā (1.40.19–20).

The prominence of Bhṛgu and various Bhārgavas in the *Bälakānda* and even more in the *Uttarakānda* is just one aspect of the increasing brāhmaṇisation of the work. The increased strictness of *varṇāśrama-dharma* rules is vividly illustrated in the episode of the summary execution by Rāma of the śūdra whose penance has caused the death of a brāhmaṇ boy (7.64–67). Asceticism is not only restricted in this way to brāhmaṇs but greater emphasis on it and detail about it are found in the third stage. Besides living on roots and fruits or on even more restricted diets and performing sacrifice (e.g. 1.50.26–27, 62.22), which were mentioned in earlier stages, fasting and lying on ashes (1.47.29, cf. 898* and 1083*) and the use of yoga techniques to gain clairvoyance (1.22.17, 7.9.14–16, 48.5+10, also 1.154* 7–8) are now referred to.²⁶ The use of *tapas* to gain specific ends (in basically the same fashion as in the *Mahābhārata*) is found for example in Gautama castrating Indra by a curse for his seduction of Ahalyā (1.47.26–27), Viśvāmitra thrusting Triśaṇku bodily into the sky (1.57–59), and Rāvaṇa and his brothers gaining various boons from Pitāmaha (7.10.10–39).

The descriptions of rituals also become more detailed and over half the references to rituals and worship in the text come from the third stage. Sacrifices mentioned for the first time in the third stage comprise the *gomedha*, the *jyotiṣṭoma* and its modifications (*ukthya*, *atirātra*, *aptoryāma*) and components (*abhiṣit*, *upasad*, *pravargya*, *viśvajit*), the *catuṣṭoma* as a part of the *aśvamedha* and the new moon ritual (*darsa*, 1.52.23c; the full moon ritual already occurs in the second stage), while officiants first mentioned now are the *adhwaryu*, *udgātṛ*, *śamitṛ* and *hotṛ*. The term *iṣṭi* also first occurs now, but only in relation to the *putreṣṭi*. The *aśvamedha* performed by Daśaratha (1.11–13) is narrated in great detail

²⁵ Söhnen-Thieme 1996.

²⁶ The only reference to such powers of clairvoyance before the third stage is in the episode of Niśākara's prophecy (*drṣṭam me tapasā*, 4.61.3c), which is in fact so late as not in reality to constitute an exception to the lateness of the ascription of such yogic powers.

and with mention of several other sacrifices but, as a means for him to gain sons, it does seem integral to the narrative of the *Bālakānda*, whereas the *putreṣṭi*, which contains the explicit details of Viṣṇu's incarnation as the four sons of Daśaratha, is awkwardly tacked on to the end of the *aśvamedha* ritual (1.14–15).²⁷ The theft of the sacrificial horse for the *aśvamedha* which is planned by Sagara precipitates the events that lead to the excavation of the ocean (1.38.4–10). Rāma's *aśvamedha* in the *Uttarakānda* is less fully narrated (7.82–83), since the interest shifts to other aspects of the story, but it has prompted narration of the performance of two other *aśvamedhas*, that offered by Indra after killing Vṛtra (7.75–77) and that to secure Ilā's restoration to manhood (7.81). In the first of these, Lakṣmaṇa narrates to Rāma both the background to and Indra's performance of the *aśvamedha*, which shows very clearly how far the Vedic pattern has been reinterpreted. Vṛtra ruled well and widely (75.4–8) and then began to practise austerities (10–11), so Indra, troubled, consulted Viṣṇu (11–18).²⁸ Viṣṇu replied that, because of past friendship with Vṛtra, he would not personally kill him but divide himself into three parts to enable Indra to do so (76.3–7). The gods agree and go to where Vṛtra is (8–11); they are seized with fear but Indra kills Vṛtra with the *vajra* (12–14) and thereby incurs the sin of killing a brāhmaṇa (15–16). The gods again appeal to Viṣṇu, as their supreme refuge, to free Indra (17–19) and he advises the performance of an *aśvamedha* to himself (20–22). Indra hides away and the earth goes to rack and ruin (77.2–5). The gods relay Viṣṇu's advice and so Indra performs an *aśvamedha* (6–9). Brahmahatya appears, seeking an alternative home and is divided into four (10–16). The gods praise Indra, who is restored, and the earth is calmed (17–18b); such is the power of the *aśvamedha* (19).

In the fourth stage, alongside the continuing decline of Indra and Brahmā noted above, there is even greater emphasis on the supremacy of either Viṣṇu or Śiva. For example, when Viṣṇu decides to become incarnate in order to kill Rāvaṇa, in a Southern insertion (1.467*) he does so at the request of a delegation of gods led by Pitāmaha and is called *deveśa* and *deo devānām*, while elsewhere the gods have to

²⁷ Incidentally, the term *iṣṭi* for sacrifice seems only to be used in relation to the *putreṣṭi*. For discussion of the status of the passage see chapter 7.

²⁸ This trend towards rehabilitation of Vṛtra interestingly parallels the shift over a much longer period in the perception of Bali documented by Hospital (1984).

turn to Śiva for help at the churning of the ocean (1 App. 8, which includes an elaborate list of his names or titles) and Brahmā gives a *mantra* of invulnerability to Rāvaṇa which lists 108 names of Śiva (7 App. 1.301–346, including such late names as Gaṇeśa, Lagudī, Jharjhārī and Brahmacārin). However, there is no real sign of the complementarity between Viṣṇu and Śiva seen in much of the *Mahābhārata*. Some of the more abstract deities of later Vedic literature are also now included by the authors of the fourth stage, which no doubt reflects their more brāhmaṇical interests: Tvaṣṭṛ (also twice in the second stage, at 2.85.11b and 6.58.40d[l.v.]), Dhāṭṛ (also rarely in the second stage, in association with Vidhāṭṛ), Pūṣan (once in the second stage, at 2.22.2d), Vācaspati (twice in the text, at 5.30.8a[l.v.] and 32.28d) and the formal grouping of the *vaiśvadevas*. On the other hand, the inclusion of the *lokapālas* and *diśāgajas* is more typical of Purāṇic religion and the increased prominence of Sūrya (for example in the *Ādityahṛdaya*, a litany to Sūrya expounded to Rāma by Agastya, 6 App. 65, cf. the 108 names of Sūrya at Mbh. 3.3.18–28) probably owes more to the revival of his cult from the Kuṣāṇa period onwards than to his Vedic origins. Minor divine beings first mentioned in the fourth stage include Dhanvantari, the divine physician (also once in the third stage, at 1.44.18a), Viṣvaksena, the Vṛkodaras, the cosmic serpent Śeṣa (Śeṣa as the name of a Prajāpati occurs at 3.13.7c) and one of Yama’s watchdogs, Sārameya (in particular at 7 App. 8.336–444).

There is increased mention in the fourth stage of *mantras* used as spells and greater elaboration of the brief details concerning ritual of earlier stages, with use of such technical terms as *anvāstaraṇika* ‘to be chosen as secondary victim’ (2.1812* 72) and the first mention of another sacrifice, the *sautrāmaṇi* (7.1383*). Pañcarātra texts are mentioned alongside the Vedas and Purāṇas when Agastya recounts to Rāma Sanatkumāra’s discourse to Rāvaṇa (7 App. 3.151), those who study the *saṃhitās* head a list which continues with Siddhas, *cakradharas*, followers of Nyāya and Mīmāṃsā and experts in grammar (7.1271* 5–7), and in a fifth-stage passage the Nyāya and Mīmāṃsā systems along with the *dharmaśāstras* are mentioned (5 App. 6.31). However, the fourth stage also includes elements which are obviously Hinduistic. Sīta’s worship of the Gangā as they cross is further elaborated with muttered invocations, sipping of water and obeisance as the exiles enter the boat (2.1096*) and with elaborate offerings of a thousand jars of wine and rice with meat (2.1101*), while the sanctity of the

Gangā is further marked by the fetching of jars of Gangā water for the planned installation ceremony (2 App. 10.20) and in the fifth stage by the assertion that the Gangā is the purifier of the whole world (2.1099* 1). There is also more definite evidence of worship of Śiva, for example in the already mentioned 108 names of Śiva (7 App. 1.301–346) and in an allusion to a *rudrākṣamālā* which should indicate a Śaiva devotee (7 App. 1.19*, a fifth-stage passage read by Ś D12 only). Emphasis on astrology increases in the fourth stage with the inclusion, for example, of horoscopes for Rāma and for his brothers (1.506* and 508*) and the assignment of a propitious moment for consecrating the hut which Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa erect (2.1206* 7).²⁹ The Bhārgavas now gain a more prominent position, even more beyond their true status than in the third stage, especially in the Southern recension (for example, in the story of Asita, added into the Ikṣvāku lineage at 1.1274*, which brings in the Bhārgava Cyavana), although it never reaches the proportions seen in the late *Mahābhārata*. All in all, brāhmaṇical influence becomes overwhelmingly apparent.

Viṣṇu and his other avatāras

The comparative lack of reverence paid to Viṣṇu in the earlier stages has already been noted and correspondingly little prominence is given to his *avatāras* (to use the normal term, which is not, however, employed in either epic). There is a marked concentration of references to worship of Viṣṇu or Nārāyaṇa in the first twenty *sargas* of the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* (and he is also called Puruṣa Janārdana at 2.4.33d) but elsewhere he appears more typically as one of a list of gods and not even the most prominent among them (for example, 3.11.17–18, 5.32.28ab and 6.82.24). Quite a wide range of individuals are compared to Viṣṇu, considering the relatively small number of such instances; they include not only Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa but also Hanumān, another of the Vānaras and even several Rāksasas.

Even more significant is the evidence for Viṣṇu's continuing subordi-

²⁹ The lateness of the two horoscopes is revealed by their inclusion of signs of the zodiac, first borrowed from the Alexandrine Greeks in the middle of the 2nd century A.D. See Pingree 1978: II, 196–98 (also pp. 268–69 for the implausibility of five planets in their exaltations), also Ferrari d'Occhieppo 1979.

nation to Indra, shown for example by the similes, already mentioned, in which Rāma is compared to Indra and Lakṣmaṇa to Viṣṇu; this persists to some degree even into the third stage (where, for example, Viṣṇu is called *indrānuja* at 1.61.24c and *devarājānuja* and *vāsavānuja* at 7.8.6b and 15b). Other instances of this greater prominence of Indra at the very points where Vaiṣṇava emphasis is later apparent include Agastya presenting Rāma with divine weapons, commonly thought of as Viṣṇu's weapons, for in the text Brahmā and Indra are as prominent as Viṣṇu (3.11.29–33, cf. 6.97.4–5) and in the first *Bālakāṇḍa* summary, added at the end of the third stage, Indra alone is mentioned (1.1.34ab). The *Bālakāṇḍa* contains another episode of bestowal of divine weapons in Viśvāmitra's gift of arms to Rāma (1.26–27/700*), where Viṣṇu's *cakra* is just one of many; this bestowal is probably modelled on Agastya's, since narratively as well as logically and theologically only one is needed. Incidentally, although Viṣṇu's discus is occasionally mentioned in the second stage, along with references to his bow, the stereotyped long compounds combining it with his conch or also with his mace, *śāṅkhacakradhara* and *śāṅkhacakragadādhara*, belong to the third and later stages; similarly, his auspicious mark, the Śrīvatsa, is mentioned once late in the second stage (6.105.23d) but not otherwise until the fourth stage. Whereas Nārāyaṇa is identified with Viṣṇu more or less throughout the *Uttarakāṇḍa*,³⁰ other names for Viṣṇu are infrequent, although Indrānuja, Govinda, Janārdana, Padmanābha, Puruṣottama, Madhusūdana, Mādhava, Vāsudeva and Hari occur in one or two passages each. In the *Bālakāṇḍa* the name Vāsudeva is given, not to Kṛṣṇa, but to Kapila (1.39.2 and 24).

Only incidental references to Viṣṇu's *avatāras* occur in the second stage, with the mention just of Rāma Jāmadagnya, Kṛṣṇa and Varāha, the boar (2.18.29, 4.27.22a[l.v.] and 6.105.12), the last of whom is here linked with Nārāyaṇa (on which there is further comment in the final section of this chapter), unlike the mention at 2.102.2–4 where Brahmā is the boar. This mention in 2.102 forms part of the Ikṣvāku genealogy in the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* which has considerable

³⁰ The name Nārāyaṇa occurs 19 times in the *Uttarakāṇḍa*—nearly three times as often as in the whole of the rest of the text (in which Nārāyaṇa occurs at 1.15.1a, 26.10b, 2.6.1d, 3c, 6.49.2d, 53.25d and 105.12a)—and at least 16 times in the fourth and fifth stages. This mirrors the restricted distribution of the name in the *Mahābhārata* and further comment on the implications is made at the end of this chapter.

similarities to one in the *Bālakāṇḍa* (1.69.17–30), although the latter does not relate the Varāha myth as an introduction to the Ikṣvāku genealogy. Prasad argues that the genealogy given in the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* is later than that of the *Bālakāṇḍa*, where it is better placed in the context of Rāma’s marriage, and therefore that the Varāha myth is a later addition in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, noting also that Jacobi pointed out that the passage from 2.99.17 to 2.103.11 is an interpolation.³¹ No doubt there are certain inconsistencies in the passage (although Prasad’s comments on the reading *ākāśaprabhavo brahmā* at 2.102.4a and as a Northern variant at 1.69.17a do not establish what he claims in that respect) and Jacobi is clearly right in seeing it as secondary, but there is no necessity to place it after the genealogy in the *Bālakāṇḍa* and indeed the fact that Brahmā rather than Viṣṇu is named argues against too late a date for it, since basically it is only in the Brāhmaṇas that Prajāpati or Brahmā has this role. On the other hand, it is reading too much into the evidence to assert, as Prasad does, that the cosmogonical parts of the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the Text-Group II of the *pañcalakṣaṇa* text therefore belong to an earlier period than the *Mahābhārata*, which throughout presents Vaiṣṇava versions of the Varāha myth.

A stage in the growth of Viṣṇu’s prestige at the expense of older gods can also be seen in the version of the Vāmana myth narrated by Viśvāmitra in the *Bālakāṇḍa* (1.28.2–11): in this version, after winning back control of the three worlds from Bali Vairocana, Viṣṇu presents them to the still prominent Indra. In his book on Bali, Clifford Hospital distinguishes four main phases in the central myth of Bali and Viṣṇu as the dwarf, among which the first phase presents Bali purely as a demonic being constituting a threat to *dharma* and this is the situation found here.³² As in the Brāhmaṇas, the dwarf is Viṣṇu and not Nārāyaṇa, as he is in the *Mahābhārata* accounts examined in chapter 5.

Rāma Jāmadagnya, by contrast, actually participates in the action of the *Bālakāṇḍa*, where his character and actions are in stark contrast to Rāma’s (1.73–75, cf. Mbh. 3 App. 14.20–71); he is treated, though, purely as a human hero. The belligerent Bhārgava, carrying his axe (1.73.18a), comes out of retirement to challenge Rāma Dāśarathi, only to be humiliated by his youthful namesake, just as

³¹ Prasad 1993; Jacobi 1893: 88–89.

³² Hospital 1984.

he unsuccessfully champions Ambā against Bhīṣma in the *Mahābhārata* (Mbh. 5.174–187), for unlike the other figures later regarded as *avatāras* Rāma Jāmadagnya lives on indefinitely and is the only one who is not confined to a particular time and place.³³ To the accompaniment of various portents, he appears while Daśaratha and his sons are returning to Ayodhyā from Rāma's wedding to Sītā and he challenges Rāma Dāśarathi to string a Vaiṣṇava bow that he proffers, just as he had the Śaiva bow of Janaka. Rāma Dāśarathi does so effortlessly, is recognised by Rāma Jāmadagnya as Viṣṇu and is honoured, before Jāmadagnya returns to Mount Mahendra. In the *Mahābhārata* his continued residence on Mount Mahendra allows him to become the tutor in weapons to Bhīṣma, Droṇa and Karṇa and this weaponry aspect may perhaps be one reason for the episode's inclusion in the *Rāmāyana*. However, the episode is traditionally understood as signifying the passing of *avatāra* status from one Rāma to the other—the narrative certainly suggests that Jāmadagnya's strength leaves him and passes to Dāśarathi (1.75.11–12)—and as such it is significant for Rāma Dāśarathi's status; undoubtedly, it has pronounced cosmic and indeed eschatological overtones, most notably in the description of Jāmadagnya's arrival (1.73.13–17) but also in the connection made with his annihilation of the *kṣatriyas* (1.73.20, 74.6–8, 23–25, 75.2). The structural parallels with his encounter with Bhīṣma are significant, as Lynn Thomas has demonstrated, and its placing as the culminating event of the *Bālakānda* which in an important sense marks the end of Rāma's childhood provides good reason for its inclusion at that point as part of the process of the enhancement of Rāma Dāśarathi's status.³⁴

However, it must be noted that even the terms *avatāra* and the earlier *prādurbhāva*, together with the verbs from which they derive, do not occur in the text in their specialised religious sense, unless the use of *prādur* in connection with the divine figure appearing to Daśaratha as he sacrifices (1.15.9c) is regarded as an instance; by the fourth stage, in this context, many manuscripts of the Northern recension include passages which use *prādur* + *vbhū* of Viṣṇu's incarnating himself in Daśaratha's sons (1.462* 11 and 463* 3).³⁵

³³ As noted in chapter 5, this point is made strongly by Lynn Thomas (1996).

³⁴ See Thomas 1996: 77.

³⁵ Paul Hacker commented on the absence of the term *avatāra* in this context (1960).

The position of Rāma

As was noted briefly already in the second section of the first chapter, there is no trace of Rāma himself in literature earlier than the *Rāmāyaṇa*, whereas a minor goddess Sītā does occur in later Vedic literature. Indeed, Cornelia Dimmitt takes these references as the starting point for arguing that, besides the portrait of Sītā as the dutiful wife, the epic also reveals her as portraying the qualities of a goddess in two ways: as mistress of the plants and animals, closely associated with the fertility of the earth, and as Rāma's *sakti*, inspiring him to action.³⁶ She also compares Sītā's capture by Rāvaṇa and rescue by Rāma with Indra's releasing the cattle from the Panis, in the story of Saramā, and suggests that Sītā appears to embody the powers of fertility and prosperity withheld from earth, as long as she is a prisoner in Laṅkā. The most significant point that Dimmitt adduces for Sītā as *sakti* is that it is because of her own actions—in sending Rāma after the golden deer and then taunting Lakṣmaṇa into going after him—that she is left unguarded for Rāvaṇa to abduct and so that the kidnapping could not have occurred without her complicity. While it is true that Sītā is partly responsible for the situation (and there are narrative reasons for it), this is a curious exemplification of the concept of the *sakti*. However, even if a degree of continuity between the late Vedic goddess and the heroine of the *Rāmāyaṇa* is accepted, this throws little light on the status of Rāma.

The process of Rāma's deification seems to be the result of his portrayal within the narrative, where he combines within himself the ethos of both *kṣatriya* and brāhmaṇa. In brief, the elevation of his character, combined with his standing as a prince, made it natural to compare him with the gods and ultimately to identify him as divine. Although Jacobi suggested that in the case of both Rāma and Kṛṣṇa an epic hero has been combined with a folk deity (the Yādava chief Kṛṣṇa with a pastoral deity Govinda, the Rāghava Rāma with a popular deity, the destroyer of demons), this part of his explanation has never found favour with other scholars.³⁷ The transformation is in fact more integral and is in a way typified by the well-known formula *rāmo dharmabhr̥tāṁ varah*, 'Rāma, best of upholders of *dharma*'. Probably its earlier meaning can best be paraphrased as 'a pillar of

³⁶ Dimmitt 1982.

³⁷ Jacobi 1893: 65.

the establishment', in which the emphasis is on *dharma* as the proper social order and even political stability, whereas later the aspect of *dharma* as moral values, almost to the exclusion of other sides of its meaning, leads to its being interpreted as denoting 'righteous Rāma', the ethical paragon. As noted in chapter 7, the distribution and nature of the formulæ used in connection with Rāma do indeed reflect this shift of emphasis in his delineation, with the most frequent and predominantly early *pāda* highlighting his restless energy (*rāmasyākliṣṭa-karmaṇah*), others emphasising his parentage, general nobility and valour (*rāmo daśarathātmajah*, *rāghavasya mahātmanah*, *rāmah satyaparākramah*), and the various *dharma* phrases then suggesting both the upholding of tradition and the moral aspect. However, the latter does not immediately oust his linking with Indra (as shown, for example, by the pair of formulæ at 5.56.17cd: *rāmo dharmabṛhtāṁ śreṣṭha mahendrasamavikramah*).

Although Rāma is clearly a martial hero and the climax of the whole work is his defeat of Rāvaṇa, from the beginning important issues of conduct were indeed central to the plot. When, on the eve of his installation as heir apparent, Rāma is suddenly sent into a fourteen-year exile through the machinations of his step-mother, his reaction is not anger but calm acceptance of his father's will—an impressive demonstration of filial obedience. So too, in similar displays of wifely devotion and brotherly affection, Sītā and Lakṣmaṇa insist on accompanying him. Once in the forest, Rāma fulfils his princely duty by offering protection to the various hermits living there. The underhand abduction of Sītā by Rāvaṇa leads inexorably to the work's climax in the siege of Rāvaṇa's capital, Larkā, and his eventual defeat. At first Rāma is regularly compared with Indra—indeed, as already noted, he and Lakṣmaṇa are at times compared to Indra and Viṣṇu respectively—and this is accepted by, for example, Dubuisson in his Dumézilian postulation of the three faults of Rāma, when not only does he point to Rāma's performance of the *aśvamedha* as proof of his committing *brahmahatyā* and his similarity to Indra but he also lists a long series of passages where Rāma is honoured by others like Indra by the gods, where Rāma in combat is compared to Indra, and where Rāma and a companion are compared to Indra and another god.³⁸ However, by the later parts of the *Rāmāyana*'s development Rāma is directly identified with the now more prominent

³⁸ Dubuisson 1986: 169–89. He also notes (p. 221) that comparisons and encounters

Viṣṇu. At the same time his defeat of Rāvaṇa is interpreted as the victory of good over evil. The older struggle between the Devas and Asuras is thus not only transposed to the human sphere but given definitely moral aspects, while Rāma's defeat of Rāvaṇa is thereby assigned the same cosmic significance as Indra's defeat of Namuci or Viṣṇu's of Bali. Equally, when Rāma is perceived to be divine, certain episodes receive a moralistic gloss to adapt them to this new outlook, for moral lapses by Rāma are now unthinkable.

Such is basically the standpoint adopted by most Western and a number of Indian scholars; many other Indian scholars prefer to see Rāma as divine at all periods of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. Thus Robert Antoine, writing in an Indian context, takes an essentially religious view of the epic and holds it to have been so from the start, interpreting the major figures as temporal representations of the *trimūrti*—Rāvaṇa and Vibhīṣaṇa of Brahmā, Rāma of Viṣṇu and Indrajit of Śiva—and regarding Rāma as being beyond human adherence to truth (thus conveniently side-stepping the issue of his sometimes questionable behaviour).³⁹ Frank Whaling has taken an intermediate line by stressing the extent to which Rāma is an exemplar of *dharma* and the ideal king from the beginning and showing how, as the Rāma tradition develops, different levels of meaning are opened up, those of Rāma the man, Rāma the successor of Indra, and Rāma the *avatāra* of Viṣṇu.⁴⁰ While he tends to underplay some of the problematic episodes, omitting for example any discussion of Rāma's beheading of the *sūdra* ascetic, one of the strengths of his treatment is his elucidation of the extent to which later developments in the understanding of the figure of Rāma are implicit in the picture drawn originally by Vālmīki; he shows well how Vālmīki's view of Rāma as the protector of *dharma* forms the nucleus around which further levels of meaning coalesced (noting also that Rāma's continuity with Indra is least clear at this point, without fully exploring its implications). Goldman suggests that the most striking aspect of Rāma's characterisation is his refusal to assert his right to the throne and to protect Sītā from the malicious gossip of his people, making the sweeping assertion that his 'exaggerated self-denial and general lack of emotion in the face of personal tragedy' contrasts with the Pāṇḍavas' insistence on their rights in the

with Indra are almost 3.5 times more frequent than the identifications with Viṣṇu and that 84.6% of them are in the text against only 54.2% of those with Viṣṇu.

³⁹ Antoine 1975.

⁴⁰ Whaling 1980.

Mahābhārata and, while in general developing a psychological interpretation, pointing out that he is thus an example of the ideal man (and by implication this is the basis for Rāma as *avatāra*).⁴¹

Pollock, however, has developed the argument that Rāma is regarded as divine from the earliest phases of the epic; this is not simply a re-affirmation of the traditional Vaiṣṇava view, since he sees the theme of the divine king as central to the work and interprets Rāma's divinity in that light.⁴² He argues that the text is pervaded by subtle intimations of Rāma's divinity which cumulatively demonstrate his dual status as human hero and deity and lead the hearer or reader to conclude that Rāma cannot just be a man but must be a god; thus, Rāma's divinity was an integral feature of Vālmiki's concept of the story. Certainly, there are a number of passages throughout the *Rāmāyana* which are illuminated by such an approach and it no doubt has a measure of validity, but it also raises problems to quite as great an extent as the more usual Western view of Rāma's gradual deification by growing identification with Viṣṇu. For example, his revival of Ruben's argument that mention of Rāma's divine status was suppressed in the *Ayodhyā* to *Yuddha kāṇḍas* fails to take any account of the fact that, while many interpolations in these books do say virtually nothing of his divine status, as he claims, many others clearly have as their *raison d'être* the vindication of such claims (to give just one example among many, Mandodarī's advice to Rāvaṇa, with its emphatic statement that Rāma is no mere human, at 6 App. 30.40, cf. 43 post. = 45 post.). This in itself goes a long way to undermining his argument that the divinity of Rāma was part of the uninterpolated fabric of the epic from the beginning. Pollock criticises previous scholars of the epic for not taking the medieval commentators seriously enough when they declare Rāma to be both god and man but the repeated, explicit assertions throughout the text itself that Rāma is simply a mortal need even more to be taken seriously.⁴³ Equally, part of his argument rests on two passages that, 'although unimpeachable on

⁴¹ *Rāmāyana* 1984–; I.49–59.

⁴² Pollock 1984, as reproduced (1991) in the fourth section of the introduction to his translation of the *Aranyakāṇḍa* (*Rāmāyana* 1984–; II, 15–54).

⁴³ Compare the questions posed by Richard W. Lariviere in his review of this volume (1993): 'One question which Pollock does not address is that of the very subtlety of this assertion of divinity. Why is the text shy about asserting the divinity of Rāma if that divinity was part of the uninterpolated fabric of the epic from the beginning? Why doesn't the text simply come right out and say that Rāma is god? Why leave such an important point to the reader to discover through the kind of

textual grounds, have often been called into question on the grounds of “higher” criticism’, where he claims in his footnote that ‘These are mere assertions’ without taking account of the arguments put forward elsewhere by the present author that stylistically these *sargas*, among others, are markedly different from the core of the epic.⁴⁴ Nonetheless, the concept of the divinity of kings may well have been a contributory factor in Rāma’s recognition as an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu.

Elsewhere, Pollock examines in depth one of the most powerful but also most problematic episodes, that of Rāma’s *unmāda* (3.58–62), first reviewing Indian interpretations and then using the concept of the king as a synthesis of various divine powers ‘to suggest that, under the compulsion of Rāvaṇa’s “egregious evil,” Rāma has become Rudra-Śiva. Like his prototype, the dread god of the forest and death, Rāma has gone mad, and like him he is bent on, and capable of, cosmic destruction.’⁴⁵ Although there is indeed much more frequent comparison of Rāma to Śiva in this book, as Pollock quite rightly emphasises, this specific argument is less convincing than his more general point that Rāma’s *unmāda* manifests the violent and destructive sides of kingship.⁴⁶

Rāma’s essential humanity is suggested, for example, by his own statements that he is subject to fate (2.98.15), that he acted as a man in avenging the insult of Sīta’s abduction (6.103.5,13 and 19) and that he is merely human (6.105.10ab—in the context of the revelation of his divinity, so perhaps ascribable to modesty rather than veracity),⁴⁷ by the Rākṣasas’ describing him scornfully as a ‘human footsoldier’ (3.25.22d, 6.98.15d), and by Hanumān’s denying his identity with

sophisticated and learned lessons that Pollock takes us through in this introduction? Pollock criticizes previous modern, scholarly readers of the epic for not taking the medieval commentators at their word when they understand Rāma to be both god and man. Why can we not be equally criticized for not taking at face value the assertions that are explicitly and repeatedly stated throughout the epic that Rāma is simply a mortal?

⁴⁴ *Rāmāyaṇa* 1984– II, 33. On the various passages that Pollock cites see Brockington 1984, especially the Appendix (329–46).

⁴⁵ Pollock 1985, reproduced in the fifth section of the introduction to his translation of the *Aranyakāṇḍa* (*Rāmāyaṇa* 1984– II, 55–67).

⁴⁶ It is also regrettable that neither in his discussion here nor in the notes to *sarga* 58 does Pollock mention that V1 and B1 omit it (nor incidentally does he mention similarities to the Nala episode of the *Mahābhārata*).

⁴⁷ However, it is interesting to note that Raghavan, who was both a devout Vaiṣṇava and an excellent scholar, comments in one of his more devotional writings (1976: 10): ‘After the accomplishment of the killing of Ravana, the gods praise Rama as God incarnate. “No,” tells Rama to them, “I am a man. I am an ordinary man,

Viṣṇu (5.48.11 and 49.26, on the second occasion explicitly calling him human). His superhuman abilities do not basically affect this, since they are part of the hyperbole natural to any epic tradition, just as are the comparisons to a deity which often accompany any display of them. For example, when he pierces seven *sāla* trees in a row with an arrow that returns to his quiver (4.11.47–12.4), Sugrīva, duly impressed as intended, declares him to be ‘equal to Indra and Varuṇa’ (4.12.10d), capable of killing all the gods along with Indra and a ‘bull among men’ (4.12.8). In similar fashion, Mārīca in his terror asserts that Rāma is king of the whole world as Indra is of the gods (3.35.13) and Mandodarī in her grief says first that he is only human and then that he must be more than that and must be Indra in the form of Rāma (6.99.5–11).⁴⁸ Most notably, when Lakṣmaṇa makes as it were a truth-act to ensure the effectiveness of his weapon against Indrajit, he does so on the basis of Rāma’s character as being unequalled among mankind (*dharmatmā satyasamdhāś ca rāmo dāśarathir yadi | pauruse cāpratidvandas tad enaṁ jahi rāvaṇim*, 6.78.31). Even the comparisons with the gods—most often with Indra—implicitly indicate that he is human.

Besides these many explicit statements of his humanity, the possible hints at Rāma’s divinity in the earlier parts of the text are limited in number and usually require later attitudes to be read into them if they are to be identified as such. Thus, the reference to Vibhīṣaṇa arriving at Rāma’s camp as coming for protection (*rāghavam śaranam gataḥ*, 6.11.14d, cf. 17d, and *salvalokaśaranyāya rāghavāya mahātmane*, 6.11.15ab, cf. 6.13.4cd) can only be taken as more than that if the religious meaning of *śarana* for Śrīvaiṣṇavas is assumed (as it is natural for the commentators to do), while Rāma’s declaration then that he is dedicated to giving freedom from fear to everyone accords perfectly well with his *kṣatriya* principles (*abhayam sarvabhūtebhyo dadāmy etad vrataṁ mama*, 6.12.20cd). The same is true for a reference to the Vānaras coming to him for protection (*śaranyam śaranam jagmuh*, 6.59.8c) and for Lakṣmaṇa saying to Rāma that he is the refuge and last resort of

Rama, son of Dasaratha” (*Aatmaanam maanusham marye Raamam Dasarathaatmajam* VI. 120.10). For his mission is to show to the ordinary man that it is possible for him to be pure, good, truthful and universally beneficent in his attitude and acts. All this should be made possible for the ordinary man and none should think that only a superman or God’s incarnation can acquire these virtues.’

⁴⁸ In typical fashion the Southern recension extends and so modifies this by having her continue that, since Indra cannot face Rāvaṇa, he must in fact be Viṣṇu (6.3114*).

everyone (*sadā tvam sarabhūtānām śaranyah paramā gatih*, 3.61.10ab). In fact, as has been stressed already, the earlier stages of Rāma's identification with deities bring him into relationship with Indra: in the second stage Indra, in his conversation with the sage Śarabhaṇga, predicts and so in effect commissions Rāma's future exploits (3.4.19), and Kabandha refers to Indra's promise that Rāma will release him from his hideous form (3.67.15–16). It is interesting to note that in the first of these two passages Indra himself is referred to as *varada*, the term later so regularly used of Viṣṇu (3.4.24a). Even in the third stage, Rāma's lifting of the curse on Ahalyā links him indirectly with Indra, the cause of her husband Gautama's curse being Indra's adultery with her (1.47–48). Most significantly, however, and quite possibly forming part of the narrative from the beginning, the arrival of Indra's charioteer, Mātali, to assist Rāma in the final duel with Rāvaṇa (6.90–100) both emphasises the *kṣatriya* element and implicitly equates Rāma with Indra. But by the third stage the decline in Indra's status, which is so obvious in the Purāṇas, is becoming apparent and so this association of Rāma with Indra must have been only a transitional phase in his evolution from moral hero to *avatāra*.

Instead, towards the end of the second stage and the start of the third, Rāma comes to be viewed as divine. Throughout most of the second stage Rāma is still viewed as human (and this is incidentally the picture presented by the *Rāmopākhyāna* at the same period) but as a particularly moral figure, so that the link with Indra becomes problematic. Already at the end of the second stage, at the close of the *Yuddhakāṇḍa*, Rāma is recognised as divine in a series of identifications with various deities (Nārāyaṇa, Varāha, Brahman and Indra among them, before an identification with Viṣṇu, 6.105.12–28), but this recognition is expressed in terms of identity and not yet as incarnation. However, it is in parts of the third stage that his divinity receives fuller and more specific recognition, with the account of his birth in the *Bālakāṇḍa* and the account of Rāvaṇa's genealogy and exploits in the first part of the *Uttarakāṇḍa*, which presents Rāvaṇa as an adversary of the gods and thus assigns to Rāma's defeat of him, the same cosmic significance as Indra's defeat of Namuci and Viṣṇu's of Bali, as well as at the end of the *Uttarakāṇḍa* with the account of Rāma's return to his form as Viṣṇu. This process of transformation in the understanding of major figures seems in the case of both epics to be linked with their passing from the hands of their traditional reciters, the *sūtas* and *kuśilavas*, into those of the brāhmaṇas as the guardians of all

traditional learning. Certainly, the extent to which it is associated in the *Rāmāyāna* with the transition from the second to the third stage would support this inference. However, equally clearly it was a gradual process and attempts to put too precise a dating to it are probably misguided. In addition, the process is highly complex.

As Brinkhaus has pointed out, in the text of the *Bālakānda* it is Viṣṇu alone who is born on earth as Daśaratha's four sons (whereas in the *Mahābhārata* it is Nārāyaṇa who descends to earth as Kṛṣṇa); he is explicitly directed by the other gods to assume a human shape to defeat Rāvaṇa, a form of words that suggests that Viṣṇu is not yet regarded as the supreme deity.⁴⁹ Elsewhere in the *Bālakāṇḍa*, in the narrative of the Trivikrama myth (1.28.2–11), Viṣṇu similarly is nominated by the other gods to perform the task of subduing Bali on their behalf, and the only identifications of Viṣṇu with Nārāyaṇa are in the fourth stage (1.726* and App. 6). Indeed, only at 6.105.12–14 in the text are they implicitly equated, when Brahmā praises Rāma by identifying him first with Nārāyaṇa and the boar, then with Viṣṇu and Kṛṣṇa, before going on to use a whole series of names and epithets and mentioning the subduing of Bali by striding over the three worlds with three strides (6.105.24). In a passage read by the NW recension (6 App. 25.26–47) Rāma is identified with Nārāyaṇa-Vāsudeva (and various deeds are mentioned, including those as the boar, as Narasiṁha, the subduing of Bali as Viṣṇu—*viṣṇutvam prāpya*, line 38)—and the elimination of *kṣatriyas* from the earth as Rāma Jāmadagnya), before identification with other gods from Brahmā onwards; Rāma is no longer a manifestation of Viṣṇu but is identical with Nārāyaṇa-Vāsudeva (and Viṣṇu is treated as one of his forms) in this passage, which is also the only one in the *Rāmāyāna* to regard Narasiṁha and Rāma Jāmadagnya as divine incarnations. Accordingly, Brinkhaus suggests that there are three stages to the process: firstly Rāma, along with his brothers, is presented as an incarnation of Viṣṇu, secondly Rāma is still identified with Viṣṇu but now also with Nārāyaṇa, and thirdly Rāma is identified with Nārāyaṇa-Vāsudeva (and Viṣṇu himself is treated as a manifestation of Nārāyaṇa).

One additional argument, though not in itself a strong one, against Rāma being seen as divine in the body of the *Rāmāyāna* is that there is no trace of a Rāma cult until very much later still. Indeed, if this argument were followed to its logical conclusion, it would involve

⁴⁹ Brinkhaus 1993.

dating the *Bāla* and *Uttara kāṇḍas* long after the dates usually assigned to them. The evidence is, however, a good deal more ambivalent than has often been implied. While it is no doubt true that, when Kālidāsa compares Rāma and his brothers at *Raghuvamśa* 10.84 to *avatāras* of *dharma*, *artha*, *kāma* and *mokṣa*, he is giving a more general sense to *avatāra* and so the passage suggests that Rāma was still not universally seen as an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu in the 5th century A.D., this does not establish that no groups saw him as such, then or earlier, and does to a certain extent imply a special status for him. Similarly, the emphasis on the fact that cult images of Rāma seem to be no older than the 11th century gives too little weight to the large number of narrative friezes and relief sculptures depicting *Rāmāyaṇa* scenes found on temples from the 6th-century Daśāvatāra temple at Deogarh onwards (on which more will be found in the final chapter), not to mention the rules for Rāma images given in Varāhamihira's *Bṛhat-saṃhitā* (which admittedly lists him along with Bali, rather than as a form of Viṣṇu to be worshipped). There is also the point that in the 9th century the Ālvār Kulacekara is known as a passionate devotee of Rāma.

More significantly, there is some epigraphic evidence from the 5th century onwards for a special position being given to Rāma; for example, there are two charters of Prabhāvatīguptā issued 'from the footprints of Rāmagirisvāmin' (the Ṛddhapur copperplate, c. 407 A.D., and an inscription from Miregaon), as well as reference to Citrakūṭasvāmin (= Rāma) in the Gadhava Daśāvatāra temple inscription of 468 A.D. The first of these is linked to Rāmagiri, the modern Rāmṭek near Nagpur, where there was very probably a sanctuary related to Rāma, quite possibly containing a footprint of Viṣṇu/Rāma, as Bakker suggests, adducing in support the motif of Rāma's sandals installed by Bharata. Nevertheless, the oldest temple which is certainly dedicated to Rāma is the Rājīvalocana temple at Rajim, near Raipur, originally built in the 7th century but restored in 1144/45 as a definite Rāma temple.⁵⁰ However, further illustration of these points belongs more to the diffusion of the *Rāmāyaṇa* and its story which, along with that of the *Mahābhārata*, forms in different ways the subject matter of the final chapter.

⁵⁰ See Bakker and Entwistle 1981: 26–28 and Bakker 1991.

CHAPTER TEN

EVOLUTION

The interrelationship of the two epics

The traditional Indian view separates the two epics widely, placing the events of the *Rāmāyana* in the Tretāyuga and those of the *Mahābhārata* at the juncture between the Dvāpara and Kali Yugas. However, as earlier chapters have made clear, the two epics are generally thought by scholars to be roughly contemporary, although it is also clear that the *Rāmāyana* had reached something like its present form well before the *Mahābhārata* did. The patterns of formulæ suggest their initial distinctness, while the occurrence of the *Rāmopākhyāna* in the *Mahābhārata* (3.258–275) suggests their subsequent convergence, as do the shifts in formulæ.

Although discussion of the interrelationship of the two epics goes back well over a century, at least to the time of Albrecht Weber, who formulated the logical possibilities for the relationship but did not seriously investigate them, Hopkins's article on the subject in 1930 was the first really comprehensive treatment of the issue.¹ He pointed out that among the battle books of the *Mahābhārata*, the *Dronaparvan* had the largest number of allusions to the Rāma story, linking this to the inflated state of that book; he also noted a large number in the *Āranyakaparvan* and made the significant point that casual allusions often appear in the form of similes which, although Hopkins does not expressly make the point, implies considerable familiarity with the story on the part of the audience as well as the poet or performer. His figures and conclusions have now to be revised in the light of the evidence of the Critical Edition, which excludes many of the similes in particular from the text. It is, however, already clear from Hopkins's treatment that a distinction can and probably should be made between the Rāma story and the *Rāmāyana*.

¹ Weber 1870 and Hopkins 1930, also Hopkins 1898b. Weber's alternatives were that the *Rāmopākhyāna* is the source of the *Rāmāyana*, that it was derived from an older version of it, that it was a modified summary of it, and that both were derived independently from a lost common source.

The biggest single issue is the relationship between the *Rāmopākhyāna* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*. This was discussed by Jacobi who was firmly of the opinion that the *Rāmopākhyāna* was based on the *Rāmāyaṇa* as we have it, of which it was a rather careless abridgement, and who drew attention to certain passages in the *Rāmopākhyāna* which are only fully intelligible with the aid of knowledge of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. Thereafter, in a rather neglected study, Eugeniusz Śluszkiewicz conducted a careful textual investigation and listed 12 correspondences between the *Rāmopākhyāna* and the S recension of the *Rāmāyaṇa* (his Bombay recension), 25 between it and the N recension (his Bengal recension), and 20 passages which are not appreciably closer to either. He noted that he found twice as many correspondences with the N recension but also pointed out that the author of the *Rāmopākhyāna* could not have relied exclusively on that recension and therefore rather hesitantly suggested that he drew on a third recension, which might be the archetype of our present versions.²

Another significant step forward was the article by Sukthankar clearly demonstrating on textual grounds that the *Rāmopākhyāna* is based on the *Rāmāyaṇa*.³ Unfortunately, though aware of Śluszkiewicz's book, he missed the significance of the preponderance of correspondences between the *Rāmopākhyāna* and the N recension and indeed considered it premature to discuss which of the existing versions of the *Rāmāyaṇa* the *Rāmopākhyāna* was closest to. However, with the benefit of his work on the Critical Edition of the *Āranyakaparvan*, Sukthankar was able to provide a concordance of 86 verbal parallels between the two and argued that these showed that the source of the *Rāmopākhyāna* was a memorised version of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. Sukthankar's views have been questioned subsequently but not seriously challenged. For example, Vaidya asserted that the *Rāmopākhyāna* as 'a genuine part' of the *Mahābhārata* was much older than the poem of Vālmīki, referring only to the presence or absence of certain incidents in support of this view,⁴ and van Buitenen has to some extent accepted Vaidya's stance by arguing that the *Rāmopākhyāna* is 'a brief, tersely stated compendium that the storyteller would know by heart and on the basis of which he could elaborate and improvise the full narrative' and that consequently the *Rāmopākhyāna* cannot be a

² Śluszkiewicz 1938: 1–38.

³ Sukthankar 1941.

⁴ *Rāmāyaṇa* 1960–75: VI (1971), xxxi–xxxvi.

summary of the *Rāmāyaṇa*.⁵ Raghavan, however, broadly reaffirmed Sukthankar's view and added a few more correspondences to his list,⁶ and van Nooten published an investigation (based on 26 *pādas* taken from the list of about 60 correspondences provided by Sukthankar in the Critical Edition) and concluded that the *Rāmopākhyāna* must have been drawn from the N recension of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, probably its NE recension, after the Southern recension had branched off, but before the *Mahābhārata* had split into a Northern and Southern recension.⁷

Two years earlier, in a similar study based on 305 correspondences (amounting to over 400 *pādas*), I had also examined the question, demonstrating how closely the *Rāmopākhyāna* is in fact based on the *Rāmāyaṇa* and investigating further its alignment with the *Rāmāyaṇa* recensions.⁸ With the establishment of the fact that one in seven *pādas* of the *Rāmopākhyāna* is paralleled in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the closeness of the two texts to each other is incontrovertibly established and their even spread in the *Rāmopākhyāna* indicates that this applies to the bulk of the text, although the greater randomness of the parallels with the *Bāla* and *Uttara kāndas* suggests a different relationship. It is also quite clear from the lists of parallels that, as others from Śluszkiewicz to van Nooten have also shown, the primary affiliation of the *Rāmopākhyāna* is with the N recension of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, and in particular with the Northeastern. If the *Rāmopākhyāna* were earlier, this would mean that the N recension is the more conservative, which is hardly likely on the evidence of the *Rāmāyaṇa* itself, and so the obvious conclusion is that the *Rāmopākhyāna* is later. However, there are a significant number of parallels with the S recension (and none with the NW recension) and a number of instances where for one *Rāmopākhyāna* verse the parallels are found partly in the N recension and partly in the S, which suggests that the pattern is more complex. In some ways the most significant diagnostic feature is the formulaic expressions occurring in the *Rāmopākhyāna*, for those found equally in both epics and those characteristic of the *Mahābhārata* form smaller groups than those characteristic of the *Rāmāyaṇa* and this third group

⁵ *Mahābhārata* 1973–78: II (1975), 207–14 (quotation from p. 210). Robert Goldman reviews the weaknesses in Vaidya's and van Buitenen's arguments (*Rāmāyaṇa* 1984: I, 34–39); Goldman was evidently unaware of the studies by van Nooten and myself mentioned below.

⁶ Raghavan 1973.

⁷ van Nooten 1980–81.

⁸ Brockington 1978.

occur mainly in sequence and so provide strong evidence of the direction of borrowing.

There are, of course, divergences between the two narratives and many of these have been ably discussed by Raghavan, who shows that they are often explicable as part of the process of condensation by the *Rāmopākhyāna* and conversely that there are occasions on which its text is scarcely intelligible without a prior knowledge of the story (for example in the episode of Bharata receiving the sandals from Rāma). Occasional rearrangements of material can also be seen to be due to the requirements of a briefer treatment, while several instances comprise the addition of detail which is almost certainly secondary. One interesting feature is that in the *Rāmopākhyāna* the material corresponding to the *Yuddhakāṇḍa* forms a larger proportion of the whole, with rather greater emphasis on the battle elements and, for instance, no fire ordeal as such, although Rāma does repudiate Sītā and she appeals to the elements for vindication. The *Rāmopākhyāna* includes some material corresponding to the *Bālakāṇḍa* in its *adhyāyas* 258 and 260 but has nothing equivalent to the *Uttarakāṇḍa* at the end, only *adhyāya* 259 at the beginning. More exactly, however, the *Rāmopākhyāna* material relates to Rāma's genealogy and divine origin (Rām. 1.14–17) and Rāvaṇa's genealogy and acquisition of near invincibility (Rām. 7.2–3 and 9–10) and the symmetry is striking, as well as their juxtaposition at the beginning of the *Rāmopākhyāna*. Although it is possible that this is another rearrangement of material in the interests of conciseness, it is more probable that in fact the relationship here is the reverse of that elsewhere, with the *Rāmopākhyāna* forming the source from which the *Bāla* and *Uttara kāṇḍas* have been expanded, especially since there are indications that the *Rāmopākhyāna* has pieced together its account of Rāvaṇa's activities from stray indications in the earlier parts of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, for the striking lack of verbal similarity to 7.11–34 contrasts markedly with its closeness elsewhere.

More generally, it may be noted that the bulk of the *Rāmopākhyāna* sees Rāma as human, but as an exemplary figure—the position reached by the middle of the second stage of growth of the *Rāmāyaṇa*; indeed, this is the logic of its inclusion here as one of the instances that Mārkandeya narrates in response to Yudhiṣṭhira's question about whether there was any man more unfortunate than he. The sole exception to this is the brief *adhyāya* 260 where Viṣṇu incarnates as Rāma, and the other gods beget heroic sons on monkeys and bears,

whereas at Mbh. 3.275.38c Rāma is merely compared to Indra at the point in the story where the gods reveal his divinity to him in the *Rāmāyaṇa* (6.105–108), a passage transitional between the second and third stages. The composition of the *Rāmopākhyāna* can thus be assigned to a period subsequent to the second stage but prior to the third; indeed, the *Rāmopākhyāna* may well be the nucleus around which the third stage of the *Rāmāyaṇa* was elaborated. If so, each epic has been the source of the other by turns: while the *Mahābhārata* is undoubtedly indebted to the *Rāmāyaṇa* at several points (not only the *Rāmopākhyāna*), the *Rāmāyaṇa* is in this case indebted to the *Mahābhārata*—to be exact, to the *Rāmopākhyāna*—for the conception of an important part of its third stage.

It is the more significant that the *Rāmopākhyāna* does not allude to Rāma's divinity in its closing chapter, since another four passages occurring in the *Mahābhārata* tradition are based on the concluding verses of the *Yuddhakānda* (6.116.80–90), prefaced in three of them by a summary of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. These passages form more nearly two pairs, since two treat Rāma as an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu (Hv. 31.110–142 and Mbh. 2 App. 21. 492–582) as part of their account of all the *avatāras*, while the other two include him among the sixteen kings of old (*Sodaśarājakiya*, Mbh. 12.29.46–55 and 7 App. 8.437–482). Both Hopkins and Sukthankar indicated that the *Śāntiparvan* version of the *Sodaśarājakiya* is earlier than the *Dronaparvan* version,⁹ and Vaidya concluded that the *Sabhāparvan* version of the *avatāra* account was taken from a text of the *Harivāṇśa* similar to his constituted text.¹⁰ In an article on all four passages together, I have examined in detail the relationship of the two pairs.¹¹ Since there is virtually no overlap between these four passages and the *Rāmopākhyāna*, it is clear that they are not secondarily derived from it and indeed their summaries of the Rāma story give the impression of being rather freer (though perhaps only because they are so much shorter). Nevertheless, the summary of the Rāma story which opens the *Harivāṇśa* and *Sabhāparvan* passages is often drawn from the actual wording of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, while the *Dronaparvan* passage has a quite separate and much shorter summary (the *Śāntiparvan* passage has only the section based on Rām. 6.116.80–90). The *Sabhāparvan* passage is longer than that in the

⁹ Hopkins 1930 and Sukthankar 1936–37: 40–42.

¹⁰ *Harivāṇśa* 1969–71: I, xlvi–xlxi. The *Harivāṇśa* passage is also related to *Brahma Purāṇa* 213.

¹¹ Brockington 1986a.

Harivamṣa and is clearly an expanded derivative of it, although it does omit a few lines of the *Harivamṣa* version; both show some evidence of acquaintance with the *Bāla* and *Uttara kāṇḍas* of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. The *Śāntiparvan* version of the *Sodaśarājakiya* draws most directly from the *Rāmāyaṇa*, independently of and probably earlier than the *Harivamṣa* passage which, despite some evidence of contact between it and the *Śānti* passage, draws separately on the *Rāmāyaṇa*; the *Dronaparvan* version of the *Sodaśarājakiya* shares a common framework with the *Śāntiparvan* version but in the body of the passage is no closer to it than to either of the *avatāra* passages and shows some evidence of acquaintance with both of them. All in all, the *Dronaparvan* passage gives the impression of being an eclectic version and the latest of the four in date.

Another independent summary of the Rāma story is that in Hanumān's account to Bhīma (Mbh. 3.147), which at one point shows evidence of acquaintance with the first *Bālakāṇḍa* table of contents (Mbh. 3.147.38/Rām. 1.1.76); in any case, Hanumān explicitly declares that Rāma is Viṣṇu in human form (3.147.28) and actually names the *Rāmāyaṇa* (3.147.11). This suggests that the passage is not only subsequent to the whole of the third stage of the *Rāmāyaṇa* but is particularly late, since naming of the *Rāmāyaṇa* is otherwise only found in passages eliminated from the text of the Critical Edition: indeed, since *rāmākhyānam* at 1.82* and *rāmopākhyānam* at 1.83*² in fact refer to the *Mahābhārata*, these references occur only in additions to the *Harivamṣa* (at App. 40.168–69 and a reference to acting a play based on the *Rāmāyaṇa* at App. I.29F.236–248). Rāma is also recognised as an *avatāra* when Dhaumya comforts Yudhiṣṭhira by instancing even gods concealing themselves, including Viṣṇu living in Daśaratha's house (Mbh. 3.299.18). So too the account of the encounter between Rāma Daśarathi and Rāma Jāmadagnya inserted by some manuscripts into the same *Tīrthayātra* section (Mbh. 3 App. 14) completely reworks and indeed substantially remodels the *Bālakāṇḍa* episode (Rām. 1.73–75), and must therefore follow some at least of the third stage of the *Rāmāyaṇa*.¹² Equally, the mention of Lomapāda as *sakhā dasarathasya* (Mbh. 3.110.19b) presumably also indicates knowledge of the *Bālakāṇḍa* (although the Rṣyaśṛṅga episode probably has an independent origin,

¹² Sukthankar's trenchant but justified comment on this passage, before the Critical Edition reached this point, was: 'This grotesque story, composed probably with the object of glorifying the Kṣatriya Rāma at the cost of the Brahmin Rāma, must be

this element seems specific to the *Bālakānda* narration). Many passages in the *Āranyakaparvan* are familiar with the Rāma story in general: Bhīma's fights with Kirmīra and with Jaṭasura are compared to that of Vālin and Sugrīva (Mbh. 3.12.47 and 154.49), Mārkanḍeya tells Yudhiṣṭhīra that his exile is similar to Rāma's (3.26.7–10)¹³ and Pulastyā's list of *tīrthas* includes both Gopratāra on the Sarayū, 'where Rāma went to heaven along with his servants, army and mounts' (3.82.63–66), and Śrṅgaverapura, where Rāma crossed the Gaṅgā (3.83.62).¹⁴

Many passages from other books of the *Mahābhārata* provide evidence of acquaintance with the Rāma story without necessarily implying knowledge of the *Rāmāyana*, although none are incompatible with the existing text and a few explicitly quote it. In the opening chapter of the work Nārada includes Rāma Dāśarathi as one of the 24 kings that he tells of (1.1.168c) and similarly in the next book *rāmo dāśarathiś caiva lakṣmaṇo* occurs as part of a list of kings (2.8.16cd), while in the *Anuśāsanaparvan* Rāma Dāśarathi is listed among 13 kings who gave cows (13.75.26c) and a genealogical list includes Daśaratha and *rāmo rākṣasahā vīrah* (13.151.43–44).¹⁵ Elsewhere allusion is made to Sītā following Rāma to the forest (4.20.9–10), Rāvaṇa practising *tapas* and choosing invulnerability as reward (5.107.12) and Rāma instructing Lakṣmaṇa in the forest (13.74.11–15). At one point in the *Śalyaparvan* Kṛṣṇa mentions various demons killed by craft, including Rāvaṇa slain by Rāma (9.30.10, mentioned also at 12.348.15, and occurring in similes at 7.71.28d and 81.17b+d), and in the same book Vaiśampāyana mentions how of old the Rākṣasas were suppressed by Rāghava living in Dandakāraṇya (9.38.9–10). Various other

quite a modern interpolation, in the *Mahābhārata*. Contextually it is an obvious misfit, being incongruously wedged in between two halves of the Agastya legend, with which it has absolutely no connection' (1936–37: 21).

¹³ Elsewhere the two exiles are compared in two additions to the *Sabhāparvan*, one of which adapts wording from the *Rāmāyana*: App. 41.6–52 adapts the wording of Rām. 2.30.4–21, including the * passages of the S recension, to describing the departure of the Pāṇḍavas, and App. 44.23–26 likens Hāstīnapura after their departure to Ayodhyā without Rāma.

¹⁴ On the other hand, the Rāmatīrtha on the Sarasvatī mentioned at 9.48.6–10 is definitely linked with Rāma Bhārgava and there is no clear evidence for the Rāmahṛada near Kurukṣetra mentioned at 9.52.20.

¹⁵ The name Rāma occurring in the *Viṣṇusahasranāma* (13.135.56a) is regarded by Hopkins (1930: 86) as referring to Rāma Dāśarathi but in my opinion there is insufficient contextual evidence to be certain which Rāma is meant. The occasional references to the Ikṣvāku dynasty (1.1.45, 91.1, 164.9, 166.1, 168.11 etc.) do not establish anything about acquaintance with the Rāma story.

allusions are found in passages excluded from the text: Rāma being deceived by the golden deer (2.583*), Rāma with Vaidehī as a model of married happiness (5.460* 5–6), Hanumān bringing the healing herbs (7.908*) and appearing on Arjuna's banner as 'the enemy of Laṅkā's forests' (*lankesāvanāriketu* 4.683* 2), Arjuna citing Rāma's infamy in killing Vālin (7.1375*) and, by contrast, in a Southern addition to the *Sāntiparvan* on the principles of fair combat, Rāma using Indra's chariot in the final contest with Rāvaṇa (12.228* 6–9).¹⁶ The *Sāntiparvan* also contains one of the two borrowings from the *Rāmāyaṇa* explicitly given as quotations, crediting a political maxim to Bhārgava, first identified by Weber as Vālmīki (Mbh. 12.57.40–41 based on Rām. 2.61.10); the other, naming the author as Vālmīki, occurs in the *Dronaparvan* (Mbh. 7.118.48+975* quoting Rām. 6.68.27).¹⁷ The same book also reveals familiarity with the *Uttarakānda*, when it alludes to Rāma killing Śambūka (Mbh. 12.149.62, Rām. 7.64–67), and with Rāma as an *avatāra* when Nārāyaṇa states that he will become manifest at the juncture of the Tretā and Dvāpara Yugas as Rāma Daśarathi and will kill Rāvaṇa in battle (Mbh. 12.326.78–81).

Another late witness to the popularity of the concept of Rāma's righteous rule, in addition to the group of four passages discussed above, is a citation of Manu and Rāma as the models of kingship (Mbh. 14 App. 1.1–2), while another excised passage cites Rāma as a great giver and performer of sacrifices (Mbh. 13 App. 14B.28–29). Somewhat similarly, in the text of the *Āśvamedhikāparvan*, Vyāsa urges Yudhiṣṭhira to perform an *āśvamedha* and cites the example of Rāma (Mbh. 14.3.9, cf. Rām. 7.82–3). Incidentally, the description then of Yudhiṣṭhira's *āśvamedha* (Mbh. 14.88) has several similarities to the account of Daśaratha's (Rām. 1.13), but this is probably because both depend heavily on *sūtra* descriptions.¹⁸ Unequivocal evidence of acquaintance with the Rāma story is, however, provided by the considerable number of similes found, predominantly in the *Dronaparvan*,

¹⁶ References to Kiśkindhā and to Laṅkā have little connection with the *Rāmāyaṇa* or even the Rāma story: at 2 App. 13.13–20, Sahadeva visits Kiśkindhā and fights Mainda and Dvivida, while at 2 App. 15.82–267 Ghāṭotkaca's exploits in Laṅkā (which is located beyond the Pāṇḍyas) are narrated. Similarly, the account of Kārtavīrya Arjuna's fight with Rāvaṇa at 2 App. 39.48–59 makes no mention of the Rāma story.

¹⁷ In other references to Vālmīki (Mbh. 1.50.14a, 12.200.4, 13.18.7a) there is a strong probability that his mention is due to his authorship of the *Rāmāyaṇa* but there is no direct indication of it in the context.

¹⁸ Specifically, Mbh. 14.90.20–22, 24–30, 34cd, 91.3–5 are similar to Rām. 1.13.4–7, 15–22, 25cd, 29–31.

which otherwise contains only the quotation from Vālmīki, already mentioned.¹⁹ This is all the more striking, since the *Dronaparvan* contains the largest number of such allusions with 10 in all, although the *Āranyakaparvan* has 9 (which rises to 10 if the verbal borrowings in the *Nalopākhyāna* are included); figures for the other books are as follows: 6 in Mbh. 12, 3 in Mbh. 13 (also a mention of Vālmiki and the name Rāma in the *Vālmikisahasranāma*), 2 each in Mbh. 1, 8 and 9 (Mbh. 1 also contains a mention of Vālmiki and a passage common to both epics), 1 each in Mbh. 2, 4, 5 and 14, but none in Mbh. 6, 10–11 or 15–18 (and a further 21 in * or App. I passages).

By contrast, there is no direct mention in the *Rāmāyaṇa* of any central character or incident from the *Mahābhārata*. Occasional attempts to prove the contrary have been conspicuously unsuccessful. For example, Raychaudhuri asserts that ‘The Uttarakānda of the *Rāmāyaṇa* is full of passages which contain undoubted references to characters of the Great Epic’ and actually cites just four: 7 App. 8.39–40+13* (mention of Vāsudeva of the Yadus), App. 1.64–83 (mention of Kṛṣṇa as Śyāma and slaughter of Kamṣa), 99* 2–3 (mention of Rādheya and Hārdikya) and 1.4a (mention of Dhaumya).²⁰ In addition, to counter the anticipated objection that the *Uttarakānda* is a later addition, he cites 1.39.2–3 (the Kapila form of Vāsudeva), 2.58.36 (Janamejaya in a list of kings), 2.27.6 (a reference to Satyavat and Sāvitri), 5.548* (another mention of Satyavat and Sāvitri along with characters in the Nala story),²¹ 4.41.22 (Puruṣottama killing Pañcajana and Hayagrīva) and 6.105.14 and 25 (Rāma’s identification as Viṣṇu).

¹⁹ Similes occur in the text at 1.50.5b (*yathā yajño dāśarathē ca rājñah*), 3.12.47 (cf. above), 195.26d (*kumbhakarnam ivāparam of Dhundhu*), 7.71.28cd (*yādr̄śam hi purā vrttam rāmarāvanayor mydhe*), 81.17d (*yādr̄g eva purā vrttam rāmarāvanayor nr̄pa*), 82.28cd (*yathā dāśarathū rāmāḥ kharam hatvā mahābalam*), 83.13d (*lakṣmanam rāvanir yathā*), 117.10cd (*yathā rāmānujenājau rāvanir lakṣmanena vai*), 131.61d (*daśagṛivasamo bale*), 132.16d (*daśa dāśarathē samāḥ*), 153.27cd (*harīndrayor yathā rājan vālisugrīvayor purā*), 166.12d (*rāmo dāśarathir yathā*), 8.4.52b (*yathā rāmena rāvanah*) and 63.20b (*tathā dāśarathē samau*). Similes are also found in later passages: 4.474* 7 (*rāmo rātrīcarān iwa*), App. 23.3 (*vālisugrīvayor*), 7.567* 2 (*rāmarāvanayoh*) and 9.315* (*rāmarāvanayos caiva vālisugrīvayos tathā*).

²⁰ Raychaudhuri 1922a. In the article as a whole he seeks to show that the *Rāmāyaṇa* is acquainted with the *Mahābhārata*, that the *Rāmopākhyāna* is not based on the *Rāmāyaṇa*, and argues against Hopkins (1901a: 60) that the *Mahābhārata* but not the *Rāmāyaṇa* is mentioned in the *grhyasūtras* and Pāṇini.

²¹ This S insertion, 5.548*, mentions a whole list of wives devoted to their husbands, many of whom may well have been known to its author from the *Mahābhārata*: Śaci, Arundhatī, Rohinī, Lopamudrā, Sukanyā, Sāvitri, Śrīmatī, Madayantī, Keśinī and Damayantī.

Their distribution is significant, as well as the fact that many are to Kṛṣṇa or Viṣṇu, not in any sense to the *Mahābhārata*.

Admittedly the stories of several individuals only briefly appearing or alluded to in the *Rāmāyaṇa* are narrated at greater length in the *Mahābhārata*, and at least one instance of the opposite (the story of Ilā/Ila narrated at length at Rām. 7.78–81 and referred to at Mbh. 1.70.16), but these are in all probability part of the traditional stock of tales independently and often secondarily included within either epic (as is almost certainly the case, for example, with Nahuṣa, mentioned in both epics). It is significant in this regard that many of them occur among the many digressions of the *Āranyakaparvan*. They include the stories of Agastya's triumph over Ilvala and Vātāpi (Mbh. 3.94–97, Rām. 3.10.53–64),²² Sagara and Asamañjas (Mbh. 3.104–5, Rām. 2.32.15–20), Rśyaśrīṅga (Mbh. 3.110–113, Rām. 1.8–9), Cyavana and Sukanyā (Mbh. 3.122–124, Rām. 1.102.16, 5.548* 7, 7.1.2 etc.), Māndhāṭṛ (Mbh. 3.126, Rām. 1.69.22–23 etc.), Aṣṭāvakra (Mbh. 3.132–4, Rām. 6.107.16) and Sāvitrī (Mbh. 3.277–83, Rām. 2.27.6 and 5.548* 5).²³ Another that belongs in this list is the story of Nala and Damayantī (Mbh. 3.50–78, Rām. 5.548* 7), which is particularly interesting, since the actual narrative in the *Mahābhārata*, the well-known *Nalopākhyāna*, undoubtedly contains verbal borrowings from the *Rāmāyaṇa*. This was conclusively established by Sukthankar, working on the basis of Gorresio's edition, which basically represents the NE recension; subsequently Jhala confirmed Sukthankar's finding that Sudeva's soliloquy at 3.65 was borrowed from Hanumān's musings in the *Rāmāyaṇa* but suggested, on the evidence of the Critical Edition of the *Rāmāyaṇa* (by then available), that the source was representative of the N recension in general rather than the NE version alone.²⁴ It is not surprising that in the closing sentence of his article, Sukthankar remarks that 'there is every indication that the interrelation between the two epics will reduce itself to a very complicated system of mutual actions and reactions'.

There are, indeed, various other instances of borrowing between

²² K. A. Nilakanta Sastri (1936: 474–86) paraphrases and discusses these and other epic references to Agastya, which include his persuading the Vindhyaś not to continue growing (Mbh. 3.102–3) and a curious contradiction of that in his heading the ṛgīs who visit Rāma in Ayodhyā after his installation (Rām. 7.1.1–8).

²³ From elsewhere in the *Mahābhārata* there is, for example, the story of king Nṛga changed into a chameleon (Mbh. 13.6.38c, 69 and 71.2, 14.93.74, Rām. 7 App. 8.13–82).

²⁴ Sukthankar 1939, and G. C. Jhala, 1968.

the two epics of wording rather than plot or characters. Another borrowing of a particular type of expression occurs in the erotic address to a woman at Mbh. 4 App. 12.1–12, based on Rām. 3.44.15–22. Similarly, Kausalyā's combined blessing and lament over Rāma at Rām. 2.22.1–15 has several verbal similarities with that of Kuntī as she abandons the infant Karṇa at Mbh. 3.292.9–21. Bharata's curses at Rām. 2.69.15–28 are paralleled at Mbh. 13.95–96 and less closely at 7.51.30 but the traditional nature of this material makes it difficult to determine the direction of borrowing (which might also be from a common source). There are also more substantial instances of common passages. One of the best known is the so-called *kaccit* chapter, which is undoubtedly a later intrusion into both epics (Mbh. 2.5 and Rām. 2.94) and may well be drawn by them from some now lost work on *nīti*.²⁵ The same is quite probably true of the passage on the evils of a kingless state found in both (Mbh. 12.67–8 and Rām. 2.61; the *Rāmāyaṇa* passage has additional parallels with Mbh. 12.15.32–3). There are also considerable similarities of wording between Daśaratha's and Yudhiṣṭhīra's *asvamedhas* (Rām. 1.13.4–7, 15–22, 25cd, 29–31 and Mbh. 14.90.20–22, 24–30, 34cd, 91.3–5) but probably because both depend heavily on *sūtra* descriptions. Part of Jaṭayus' genealogy (Rām. 3.13.17–33), which has pronounced cosmological overtones, is largely identical with a cosmological chapter of the *Ādiparvan* (1.60.54–67) but the direction of borrowing is unclear (the *Mahābhārata* passage is poorly integrated into its context, which may suggest borrowing from the *Rāmāyaṇa*, but the possibility remains that both are borrowing from a common source).

There are also, at a late stage in the *Rāmāyaṇa* textual tradition, instances of acquaintance with the *Mahābhārata*. Perhaps the most obvious is the nearly exact quotation at 2.1833* (a Northern insert) of *Bhagavadgītā* 2.27. Another example is that one part of the search party accounts of the *Rāmāyaṇa* (Rām. 4.42.40–44+993*) has several long compounds in common with one *adhyāya* of the *Anuśāsanaparvan* (Mbh. 13.80.20–21, 23–26); since several of these compounds are commoner in the *Mahābhārata*, the direction of borrowing is presumably from *Mahābhārata* to *Rāmāyaṇa*. What is particularly significant is that all of these common passages belong to the later stages of expansion of each epic, suggesting that their mutual acquaintance does

²⁵ For details see Hopkins 1898b, and Tiwari 1959 and 1960. The date suggested for both by Tiwari is 'the reign of Candragupta Vikramāditya of the Gupta dynasty'.

not go back to the earliest stages. The insertion of a limited amount of didactic, ethical, philosophical and political material, perhaps intended to give the *Rāmāyaṇa* as well an encyclopaedic dimension, seems to have occurred under the influence of those same Bhārgavas responsible for the transformation of the *Bhārata* into the *Mahābhārata*, as noted earlier. There are certainly similarities in the evolution and transmission of the texts, quite apart from some thematic analogies or geographical parallelisms, which suggest that, at least in their later phases of evolution, the two epics developed in parallel, and possibly even in the same locality.

Influence on classical Sanskrit literature

The fact that much of classical Sanskrit literature is based in terms of plots on the two epics is well known, although even so the extent is not always sufficiently realised. The following survey is not intended to be exhaustive but simply illustrative, since a complete survey would be beyond the scope of the present book. Its main purpose is to demonstrate something of the extent and nature of that influence, and to draw attention to some of the secondary literature.²⁶ However, these classical plays and dramas can also reveal worthwhile information about the state of the text of the epics at different periods and in different regions, as well as highlighting changes in attitudes by alterations in the story line; some remarks on these aspects will therefore be included in the ensuing survey.

Possibly earlier than any influence on classical Sanskrit literature is the evidence of acquaintance with the *Mahābhārata* story found in the Buddhist *Jātakas*: in the *Sambhava Jātaka* Dhananjaya Koravya of Indapatta is mentioned, along with his adviser Vidhūra, and his descent from Yuddhiṣṭhila is given in a *gāthā*; in the *Kuṇāla Jātaka* Kanhā, married to the five Pāṇḍu brothers from Takkasilā, is condemned for her immorality; and in the *Kumbha Jātaka* the evil effects of alcohol are illustrated by the mutual destruction of the Vṛṣnis and Andhakas.²⁷ Interestingly, the destruction of the Vṛṣnis and Andhakas also figures as a moral warning in Aśvaghoṣa's *Buddhacarita* but the

²⁶ A fuller account of the literature based on the *Rāmāyaṇa* (with citation of the older secondary literature) is contained in Brockington 1984: 242–50.

²⁷ Cf. Heinrich Lüders 1904.

author probably took it directly from the *Mahābhārata* (and definitely draws on the *Sāntiparvan*), although he also refers to a story about Śamtanu's love for Gāṅgā and his grief at being left by her which is not found in the extant epic, so he may have had other sources. Aśvaghoṣa was also acquainted with the *Rāmāyaṇa* and Raghavan demonstrates his borrowings in the harem scene of the *Buddhacarita* from the *Sundarakāṇḍa* (5.7–9), including parallels in wording, and finds some echoes of the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* (esp. 2.98) in *Saundarananda* 15.31–34.²⁸

Besides these drawings on the epics to be found in Buddhist literature, there is also evidence for the influence of the *Mahābhārata* on the animal fable literature. Harry Falk has looked at several stories in the *Mahābhārata* as sources for the *Pañcatantra*: the two birds and the hunter (5.62), the pact made between the mouse and the cat (12.136), the night attack by an owl on sleeping crows (10.1.34–42), the jackal serving as minister to a tiger as king (12.112), the brāhmaṇ woman Śāṇḍilī as the perfect wife (13.124) and the story of the three fishes (12.135).²⁹ It is also worth noting that there are several parallels with the *Pañcatantra* or the *Hitopadeśa* in one chapter of the *Udyogaparvan* (Mbh. 5.33). In addition, various of the stories in the *Kathāsaritsāgara* have been drawn from the *Mahābhārata*, mainly from the *Ādi* and *Śānti parvans*.

The question of the relationship between the epics—mainly the didactic parts of the *Mahābhārata*—and the *dharmaśāstra* literature is more complex. There are substantial numbers of near or exact parallels between verses occurring in the *Mahābhārata* and the *Mānava-dharmaśāstra*, although they are unevenly distributed in both texts. In the *Mahābhārata* there are particular concentrations in the *Āranyaka*, *Udyoga*, *Śānti* and *Anusāsana parvans*, with a complete or nearly complete absence in the *Drona*, *Karna* and *Śalya parvans*; in *Manusmṛti* most occur in *adhyāyas* 1–4, 7 and 9; in the *Rāmāyaṇa* they are more sporadic and more randomly distributed. It is highly likely that a substantial proportion of these parallels are derived from a common tradition (for example, the dictum that a king who takes the sixth part in tax without protecting his subjects in return incurs sin, found at *Manu* 8.308, Mbh. 12.137.96 and 13.24.78, and *Rām.* 2.69.13 and

²⁸ Raghavan 1956a. Raghavan also claims that the *Lalitavistara* and the *Mahāvastu* show as striking parallels to the *Rāmāyaṇa* as Aśvaghoṣa's works.

²⁹ Falk 1978.

3.5.10–13) but equally it is probable that some have been borrowed from one text into the other; indeed, the *Mahābhārata* explicitly knows of Manu as a lawgiver (e.g. Mbh. 3.33.36, cf. 12.257.5ab, 13.64.3ab and 66.19), although in the *Rāmāyaṇa* this is not found until the fourth stage (Rām. 4.397* 2). In general terms, the parallels found in the didactic parts of the *Mahābhārata* are closer to the extant text of the *Manusmṛti* than those found elsewhere and it seems likely that they are derived from it (and thus are later than its presumed date in its extant form of approximately the 2nd century A.D.).³⁰

Among the plays attributed to Bhāsa no less than six are on themes derived from the *Mahābhārata* and another two based on the *Rāmāyaṇa*. His *Pañcarātra* takes as its theme the battle at the end of the *Virāṭaparvan*; the *Dūtavākyā* is based on Kṛṣṇa's unsuccessful mission to the Kauravas to seek peace in the *Udyogaparvan*; the *Madhyamaryāyoga* narrates an incident where Bhīma meets his son by Hidimbā, Ghaṭotkaca, who takes him to his mother, and in the *Dūtaghaṭotkaca* Ghaṭotkaca acts as an envoy to try to stop the war half way through (these episodes are not found directly in the *Mahābhārata*); in the *Karṇabhāra* the scattered incidents of Karṇa's life found in the epic are reordered and focused on the deception by which Indra deprives him of the earrings and armour that give him immortality; and the *Ūrubhangā* tells the story from the *Śalyaparvan* (9.57) of how Bhīma fights with Duryodhana and breaks his thighs.³¹ The *Pratimānātaka* is a free and selective treatment of the events of the *Rāmāyaṇa* from the *Ayodhyā* to the *Yuddha kāndas* and takes its name from the way that the author handles Bharata's return to discover that his father is dead, since he enters a shrine to his ancestors and sees there an image, *pratimā*, of Daśaratha. The *Abhiṣekanātaka* begins with the conflict between Vālin and Sugrīva and ends with the installation, *abhiṣeka*, of Rāma. Eugeniusz Śluszkiewicz has collected and tabulated the borrowings in Bhāsa from the *Rāmāyaṇa*, demonstrating thereby the existence, probably towards the middle of the 1st millennium A.D., of a *Rāmāyaṇa* recension intermediate between the S and NE recensions.³²

Kālidāsa takes the plots of several of his works from the epics.

³⁰ The treatment by Hopkins (1901a: 17–23) is in need of updating but is still valuable.

³¹ For translations of the *Karṇabhāra* by Barbara Stoler Miller and of the *Ūrubhangā* by Edwin Gerow see Bhāsa 1991a and 1991b.

³² Śluszkiewicz 1957.

Emeneau demonstrates that Kālidāsa borrowed directly from the *Mahābhārata* in his *Śakuntalā* by a comparison of Mbh. 1.68.52–60 with *Śakuntalā* 7.17 and 19.³³ However, Kālidāsa also altered the story to some extent, softening the characterisation of king Duḥṣanta and introducing the ring which the king leaves as a token; in particular, whereas Śakuntalā in the *Mahābhārata* does not quail at being left alone and, when rejected by Duḥṣanta, curses him, Kālidāsa makes her timorous and tearful, cursing her fate. His *Kumārasambhava* may well be indebted to the account of the birth of Skanda in the *Mahābhārata* (3.213), although this is clearly not the sole source. His *Raghuvamśa* sets the story of Rāma within the framework of the whole dynasty of the Ikṣvākus, where for its earlier members Kālidāsa follows a different genealogy from that found in the *Rāmāyaṇa*. Its fame was soon sufficiently widespread for Kumāradāsa (possibly 6th century) to model his *Jānakīharāṇa* on it to a large extent, although he also derives some material directly from the *Rāmāyaṇa* (the wording used being closest to the NE recension).³⁴

Bhattī's *Rāvaṇavadha* (often called the *Bhattikāvya*), written in the 6th or early 7th century, provides a fairly full summary of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, on which it is directly based, though omitting the *Uttarakāṇḍa* and much of the *Bālakāṇḍa*; on the other hand, it develops considerably certain erotic scenes added to the *Sundarakāṇḍa* and the battle scenes of the *Yuddhakāṇḍa*. Śluszkiewicz demonstrates that the *Rāvaṇavadha* draws on a *Rāmāyaṇa* version intermediate between the current NE and S recensions, while noting that his tables of correspondences show that for the *Bālakāṇḍa* the *Rāvaṇavadha* follows the S recension and for the *Yuddhakāṇḍa* the N recension.³⁵ Bhāravi in perhaps the 6th century based his *Kirātārjunīya* on Arjuna's journey to the Himālayas to acquire divine weapons from Śiva and his encounter with the god disguised as a Kirāta; the story line is basically the same as in the *Mahābhārata* but told in an elaborate style and extended with homilies on politics and philosophy, along with a definite *bhakti* dimension.³⁶

In the 7th century, Bāṇa in his *Harṣacarita* pays tribute to Vyāsa as the author of the *Mahābhārata*, while eulogising the Puṣyabhūti dynasty by declaring that their history will be like a second *Mahābhārata*; he

³³ Emeneau 1962.

³⁴ For the last point see Śluszkiewicz 1938 (ch. 3).

³⁵ Śluszkiewicz 1957.

³⁶ For an analysis see Indira Peterson 1991.

seems also, on the testimony of Bhoja and others, to have written a now lost play, the *Mukutatādīta*, around Bhīma's vow to slaughter Duryodhana. Māgha's *Śiśupālavadha* is based on the killing of Śiśupāla in the *Sabhāparvan* (2.37–42) and presents his death at Kṛṣṇa's hands as conferring union with Kṛṣṇa; however, he treats the basic *Mahābhārata* plot with considerable freedom. Bhaṭṭa Nārāyaṇa's *Venīsamhāra*, probably written around 700 A.D., takes its title from the new incident which forms the focus of its plot, where Bhīma, after he has killed Duryodhana, ties up Draupadī's hair which she has vowed to leave loose until the insult in the *sabha* had been avenged. David Gitomer has interestingly explored the way in which Bhaṭṭa Nārāyaṇa highlights the homologies between Bhīma and the Rākṣasas already present in the *Mahābhārata* narrative.³⁷ Later writers credit Daṇḍin, who wrote late in the 7th century, with the first of the poems designed to tell the stories of both epics simultaneously, the *Dvisamdhāna*, and a few verses are preserved by later quotations. Two later examples of this genre, which testifies to the joint place of both epics in classical culture, are both called *Rāghavapāṇḍavīya*, one by Dhanamjaya in the first half of the 12th century and the other by Kavirāja, in the second half.

Bhavabhūti, early in the 8th century, wrote the *Mahāvīracarita* and the *Uttararāmacarita*, which between them tell the whole *Rāmāyaṇa* story.³⁸ The *Mahāvīracarita* narrates the main events up to the triumphant return to Ayodhyā and introduces two innovations often followed in later dramas: a meeting of Rāma and Sītā before the *swayamvara* and Rāvaṇa's attendance at it (which has the effect of turning the whole plot into a feud between Rāma and Rāvaṇa by altering the balance between the elements of the original). The *Uttararāmacarita* develops certain themes of the *Uttarakāṇḍa* centring round Sītā's banishment; in it Bhavabhūti quotes directly Rām. 1.2.14 (identical in all recensions), 1.1394* 3–6 (broadly NE) and 2 App. I.26.11–12 (N), strongly indicating that he follows the N recension. Nevertheless, one author stands this whole process on its head, arguing that the *Rāmāyaṇa* was composed by Bhavabhūti, who also wrote the later cantos of the *Raghuvamśa* as part of his campaign to secure its recog-

³⁷ Gitomer, David L. 1991.

³⁸ Raghavan (1968) collects and analyses for their value for textual criticism, whether higher or lower, quotations from the *Rāmāyaṇa* in works such as Bhavabhūti's plays, the *Mahābhārata*, Manu and Kālidāsa's *Raghuvamśa*. His main point is that these testimonia are older than extant manuscripts of the *Rāmāyaṇa*.

nition as an ancient work, and he therefore holds that the story of Vālmīki has been interpolated into the *Mahābhārata* and that authors such as Bhātti based their works on the *Rāmopākhyāna*.³⁹

Anangaharṣa Māyurāja or Mātrarāja (no later than 8th century) wrote the *Udāttarāghava*, a play on the same part of the Rāma story as the *Pratimānāṭaka*, on which it is probably based, although the author introduced substantial changes in the story (such as Lakṣmaṇa going to hunt the golden deer instead of Rāma). Similarly, Śaktibhadra (perhaps 9th century) is indebted to Bhavabhūti in his *Āścaryacūḍāmaṇi*, especially in emphasis on the theme of a long-standing feud between Rāma and Rāvaṇa, and the *Kundamālā* of Dhīranāga (pre 12th century) is modelled on the *Uttararāmacarita*; both plays take their names from the form of recognition token used. Kulacēkarar, in the 9th century, is credited with the authorship of a play, *Tapatīsamvarāṇa*, based on the story of Saṃvarāṇa, the father of Kuru and husband of Tapatī, the daughter of Sūrya (Mbh. 1.160–163), which is still included in the Kūṭiyāṭṭam performance tradition.⁴⁰

The *Anaraghārāghava* by the 10th-century poet Murāri, while itself drawing on Bhavabhūti, seems to have been one source for the contemporary *Bālarāmāyaṇa* by Rājaśekhara; it has now been translated into German, with an accompanying study.⁴¹ Rājaśekhara composed plays based on both epics, the *Bālabhārata* and *Bālarāmāyaṇa*. The *Bālarāmāyaṇa* is probably the longest Sanskrit play ever written and his *Bālabhārata* would have been even more extensive on the evidence of the two acts which alone were completed. Ironically, in the prelude to the first act of the *Bālabhārata* Rājaśekhara presents an imaginary encounter between Vālmīki and Vyāsa, in which Vālmīki both commends Vyāsa for finishing the *Mahābhārata* and reproves him for making it so long; Vyāsa's response is to blame it onto Gaṇeśa and his conditions for agreeing to write the story down—apparently the first occurrence of this well-known story which eventually finds its way into some strands of the *Mahābhārata* textual tradition. In

³⁹ Kurup, P. Kunhirama 1963: 22–23. He also asserts that ‘till Bhavabhuti’s time no author of ancient India had made any reference to Valmiki or his Ramayana’ (p. 23), that all references to the *Rāmāyaṇa* in the *Mahābhārata* were interpolated by Bhavabhūti (pp. 31–2), and that there are frequent references in the *Rāmāyaṇa* to *Mahābhārata* episodes (pp. 29–30).

⁴⁰ See the edition and translation by N. P. Unni and Bruce Sullivan (Kulacēkara 1995).

⁴¹ Murāri 1997.

relation to the history of the emergence of various episodes, it is also noteworthy that there is no role for Kṛṣṇa in miraculously reclothing Draupadī when Duḥśāsana attempts to disrobe her.⁴²

Direct borrowing from Bhavabhūti, Murāri and Rājaśekhara is visible in the sprawling *Hanumannāṭaka* or *Mahānāṭaka*, which may belong in origin to the 11th century, although it continued to grow and now includes close similarities to the early 13th-century work by Jayadeva, the *Prasannarāghava* (a work of greater significance than many later plays, since it was clearly one of the sources used by Tulsīdās). The Kāśmīri polymath Kṣemendra in the middle of the 11th century composed summaries of both epics, the *Bhāratamāñjarī* and the *Rāmāyaṇamāñjarī*; these are of little literary merit but have sufficient importance for the history of the text to have been consulted by the editors of both Critical Editions. In the case of the *Mahābhārata* Kṣemendra's work agrees most closely with the Śāradā manuscripts, which in the main represent the best text, and in the case of the *Rāmāyaṇa* is closest to the NW recension. By contrast, Śluszkiewicz has concluded that the source of the *Campū Rāmāyaṇa* by Bhoja, also in the 11th century, must have been the Bombay recension, with some influence also from Kālidāsa's *Raghuvamśa*.⁴³

Another ślesakāvya from the middle of the 12th century, Sandhyākaranandin's *Rāmacarita*, seeks to honour the late Pāla ruler, Rāmapāla (c. 1072–1126), by telling simultaneously his story and that of Rāma Dāśarathi. Emeneau has investigated whether Śrīharṣa (probably 12th century) in his *Naiṣadhadarita* knew the text of the *Mahābhārata* as found in the Critical Edition (where the Nala episode is shorter than the vulgate by 21.5 verses) or as found in the vulgate.⁴⁴ He decides that Śrīharṣa was working from a text which lacked 224* after 3.54.27 and so from a text of the type 'represented by the few "central" manuscripts (D1–3) that do not have this interpolation and by the best Kashmir manuscripts.'

Besides the numerous works of creative literature (and those so far listed are by no means the whole of what was produced), another index of the esteem in which the epics were held is the frequency with which they are referred to by the literary theorists. Ānandavardhana and Abhinavagupta (*Dhvanyāloka* and *Locana* 1.5) treat at

⁴² This is noted by Gary Tubb in an article which primarily provides a translation of Act 2 of the *Bālabhārata* (Tubb 1996).

⁴³ Śluszkiewicz 1925.

⁴⁴ Emeneau 1960.

some length the incident of the slaughter of the *krauñca* and Vālmīki's discovery of the *śloka*, while more generally the *Rāmāyana* is regularly referred to as the *ādikāvya* from the time of Bhavabhūti onwards. Ānandavardhana also identifies the predominant *rasa* of the *Mahābhārata* as being *sānta*, which Kuntaka in his *Vakroktijivita* extends in declaring that previous theorists regarded the *sānta rasa* as basic to both the *Rāmāyana* and the *Mahābhārata*. Ānandavardhana, Mammaṭa, Viśvanātha and Mahimabhaṭṭa have all quoted individual verses from the *Mahābhārata*.

In the 17th century there was something of a revival in the composing of works on *Rāmāyana* themes, among them the *Janakajānanda* of Kalyalakṣmīnṛsiṁha (drawn mainly from the *Uttarakāṇḍa* with Kuśa as its hero, but also influenced by the *Jaiminibhārata*) and the *Adbhutadarpana* of Mahādeva (so named from the magic mirror which enables Rāma to witness events in Lankā), as well as several now apparently lost (Rāmabhadra's *Jānamīparinaya*, Venkaṭaḍhvārin's *Uttaracampū*, Vāsudeva's *Rāmakathā*, Madhurāvāṇī's *Rāmāyaṇasāra* and two works by Veṅkaṭeśa). The tradition of composing Sanskrit dramas or *mahākāvyas* on themes drawn from the two epics has continued well into the twentieth century; indeed, they are too many to list and comment on here and a couple of examples must suffice: a poem on the meeting of Bharata with Rāma and his return with the sandals by Nārāyaṇakavi (1868–1935) and a *mahākāvya* in thirteen cantos, the *Sundara-rāmāyana*, composed by C. Sundara Sastriar.⁴⁵

Adaptations in Sanskrit

The Purāṇas, which in several respects continue the epic tradition, as well as displaying a more pronounced religious emphasis, usually include the story of Rāma, some only briefly but others at greater length, based more or less directly on the *Rāmāyana*, whereas their narratives of Kṛṣṇa do not derive directly from the *Mahābhārata*—although they quite often allude to incidents first told there—but rather from the *Hariwamśa*.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Nārāyaṇakavi 1973 and Sundara Sastriar, C. 1954. I am indebted to the author's son, the noted art historian C. Sivaramamurti, for the gift of a copy of the latter work.

⁴⁶ For further details on the *Rāmāyana*-related material in this section (with citation of the older secondary literature) see Brockington 1984: 226–41 and 250–59.

The *Vāyu* and *Viṣṇu Purāṇas* contain only brief treatments of the Rāma story, concluding in the *Vāyu Purāṇa* with the traditional lines on *rāmarājya*; by contrast, the *Padma Purāṇa* has several lengthy narratives. Whereas the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* declares that Viṣṇu was born fourfold as Rāma and his three brothers, the *Padma Purāṇa* shows the more developed pattern where Rāma himself is the *avatāra* of Viṣṇu, Bharata of the *śaikha*, Lakṣmaṇa of Ananta and Śatrughna of the *cakra*; some later Vaiṣṇava Purāṇas elaborate further by correlating the four brothers with the *caturvūha* of the Pāñcarātra system. The *Kūrma Purāṇa* contains the important theological development of the illusory Sītā created by Agni before her seizure by Rāvaṇa—thus safeguarding the real Sītā’s purity—which then occurs also in the *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa*, Tulsīdās’ *Rāmcaritmānas* and elsewhere. The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, though focusing of course on Kṛṣṇa in its 10th *skandha*, also contains a substantial account of Rāma and, in keeping with its *bhakti* emphasis, has Rāma take Sītā from the *aśokavana* straight back to Ayodhyā without any ordeal.

The account in the *Brahma Purāṇa* of the youthful exploits of Kṛṣṇa is the briefest of those in the Purāṇas but is nevertheless closely related to and most probably derived from that in the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, where the fifth book is modelled on the main part of the *Harivamśa*, as is the tenth *skandha* of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. Certainly, the relationship of the wording of the Kṛṣṇa episodes in the *Brahma Purāṇa* and the *Harivamśa* is one of similarity, while that between the *Brahma Purāṇa* and the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa* is one of virtual identity.⁴⁷ The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* version seems to be the source of the account in the *Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa* and there are also briefer allusions in several other Purāṇas. However, there is very little in any of the Purāṇas which derives from the narrative of the *Mahābhārata*, although there is a certain amount which resembles passages in its didactic component.

A significant difference between the two epics is visible in the number of subsequent Sanskrit versions or adaptations composed. In the case of the *Mahābhārata*, apart from Jain versions (which in any case mostly derive from the *Harivamśa*), there is only the *Jaiminībhārata*, already mentioned in the second section of the first chapter, whereas in the case of the *Rāmāyaṇa* there are the *Yogavāsiṣṭha*, *Adhyātma*, *Bhuśundi* and *Ānanda Rāmāyaṇas*, as well as the eclectic *Tattvasaṃgraha*.

⁴⁷ See Ruben 1939 and 1941a, and *Brahma Purāṇa* 1989: xxiv–xxxi. For a theological analysis of the Kṛṣṇa accounts in these texts see Sheth 1984.

Rāmāyaṇa and Jain versions. The *Jaiminībhārata* is often also called the *Jaiminīyāśvamedha*, since it is a retelling of the *Āśvamedhikaparvan*, and it belongs at the latest to the 12th century (though probably not much earlier). Its description of the *āśvamedha* in fact lays emphasis on events during the horse's wandering with the capture of the animal by various enemies of the Pāṇḍavas but does have a ritual element. On the other hand, the emphasis on the way that Kṛṣṇa resolves the dilemmas directly or indirectly introduces a significant element of Kṛṣṇa-*bhakti* in a way that aligns the text with the Purāṇas. It was clearly a popular work and has been translated into various modern Indian languages, especially in South India, but also extensively in eastern India.⁴⁸ There are also a certain number of works which, as part of their claim to authority, declare that they belong to the *Mahābhārata*, such as the *Dharmaśaṁvāda*, *Garbhagītā* and *Uttaragītā*, as well as summaries of it, such as the *Itihāsasamuccaya* and *Bhāratasāvitri*.

The first Jain version in Sanskrit of the *Mahābhārata* or *Harivamṣa* is Jinasena's massive *Harivamśapurāṇa* in the 8th century; this inserts a much modified and down-played version of the story of the Pāṇḍavas into what is basically, underneath the extensive changes of name, a form of the Kṛṣṇa story that emphasises the conflicts with Kaṁsa and Jarāśamda. Several more Jain texts called *Harivamśapurāṇa* were written by Sakalakīrti (1464 A.D.), Śrutakīrti (1496 A.D.), Dharmakīrti and others. Among Jain versions specifically of the *Mahābhārata* may be mentioned the *Pāṇḍavacarita* by Devaprabhasūri, written in the 13th century, and the *Pāṇḍavapurāṇa* by Śubhacandra, written in 1550/1 A.D.⁴⁹ However, the greatest influence of the Kṛṣṇa story is seen in the development within the Jain universal history of the triads of heroes among the 63 *śalākāpuruṣas*, since these are clearly modelled on Kṛṣṇa mythology; the most developed instance is in Hemacandra's *Trīṣaṭīśalākāpuruṣacarita* from the 12th century.

Among later *Rāmāyaṇa* versions, the *Yogavāsiṣṭha*, which claims in its present form to be by Vālmīki, also asserts that it is the twelfth narration of the story and expounds a basically Advaita Vedāntin viewpoint (though one deeply influenced by Buddhist idealism), with considerable stress on Rāma as a *jīvanmukta*. Though a sophisticated Sanskrit literary work, it thus has elements with a wider appeal, for it represents a unique blend of abstract philosophy and vivid

⁴⁸ For further details see Koskikallio 1993 and 1995.

⁴⁹ See Bai and Zydenbos 1991.

narrative—performing for the philosophical side of Hinduism what some other *Rāmāyanas* do for the religious, devotional aspect—and has been translated into many of the vernacular languages of India. It constitutes one of several instances of the attempt by the *bhakti* movement to enhance its status by adopting Advaitin terminology. However, evidence is now emerging for the development of this text (also known by the names *Mahārāmāyaṇa*, *Ārsarāmāyaṇa* and *Jñānavāsiṣṭha*) through the work of Walter Slaje; manuscript evidence makes clear that around an earlier *Mokṣopāya* or *Mokṣopāyaśāstra* by an individual author (basically the form of the text commented on by Bhāskarakaṇṭha in the 18th century) a series of frames was added, first turning it into a dialogue between Vasiṣṭha and Rāma and then in three further stages making a direct textual connection with the *Bālakāṇḍa* and eventually producing the enlarged text ascribed to Vālmīki.⁵⁰ The earlier form of the text is quoted by Vidyārāṇya in his *Pañcadaśī* in the first half of the 14th century but the present form of the work must be very recent.

This linking of Advaita Vedānta with *bhakti* is even more apparent in the *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa*, which teaches a form of Advaita combined with belief in Rāma's saving grace and regards the worlds therefore as an illusion imposed on the eternally blissful Absolute. It is, nonetheless, primarily a *bhakti* work and stresses overall the cult of Rāma through devotion, worship and pilgrimage. It is theoretically a part of the *Brahmānda Purāṇa* but has always been transmitted separately; in its retelling of the Rāma story, it considerably abridges it and frequently interrupts the plot with philosophical passages. It is sometimes ascribed to Rāmānanda, the first major figure in the history of Vaiṣṇava *bhakti* in the north, and in all probability is a product of his school; it also incorporates the *Rāmagītā*, probably an earlier, more narrowly Advaitin work, but now included in it as Rāma's own teaching on the way of salvation. As Whaling has pointed out, among its notable features are the attempt to provide Rāma with a teaching role in emulation of Kṛṣṇa and a corresponding reduction in emphasis on *rāmarājya*.⁵¹

Similarities with Kṛṣṇa are much more obvious in the *Bhuśundi Rāmāyaṇa*, probably of the 14th century, which narrates Rāma's child-

⁵⁰ See Slaje 1994, also Slaje 1996.

⁵¹ Whaling 1980: 105–218. In other respects Whaling overstresses the innovativeness of the *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa* through taking insufficient account of the developments found in the *Purāṇas*.

hood sports on the model of Kṛṣṇa's.⁵² It blends a strongly Advaitin outlook with *bhakti* in the style of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and indeed Bhagwati Prasad Singh suggests that its obscurity, which meant that it was for a long time generally thought to have been lost (despite having been one of Tulsīdās' sources), was due to its restriction to the Rāmrasik sect of Rāma devotees. There is perhaps some evidence of tantric influence in the way that Sītā is regarded as Rāma's śakti and is termed Sahajā or Sahajānandinī. However, the *Adbhuta Rāmāyaṇa* (or *Adbhutottarakāṇḍa*) has a definitely śākta character, with Sītā herself going into action in the form of Devī to destroy Rāvaṇa's thousand-headed brother in a manner which would delight modern militant feminists. Its author presents it as an eighth *kāṇḍa* of the Vālmīki *Rāmāyaṇa* and provides an abbreviated version of the original (jumping, for example, from the births of Rāma and Sītā, via the encounter with Paraśurāma, to the departure into exile), concentrating instead on its central episode, which is clearly modelled to a significant extent on the *Devīmāhātmya* and Śākta mythology in general, although some peripheral events are influenced by folk material. There is a definite folk element in the *Ānanda Rāmāyaṇa*, which belongs somewhere in the 15th to 17th centuries (its title perhaps indicates that it was written by a member of the Marāthī Ānandasampradāya).⁵³ This includes several unusual episodes, such as Rāvaṇa's abduction of Kauśalyā at the time of her marriage to Daśaratha, Sītā's birth from fire, the seven *sāl* trees pierced by Rāma being supported by the king of snakes (a common theme in *Rāmāyaṇa* relief sculpture) and the creation of Lava by Vālmīki as a surrogate for Kuśa; it also contains two episodes clearly intended to link it with Kṛṣṇa mythology: in one Rāma promises some Apsarases that they will fulfil their desire for him in his *avatāra* as Kṛṣṇa and in the other he grants to a devoted maid-servant the boon of becoming Rādhā in a future birth. The last of these devotional *Rāmāyanas*, the *Tattvasaṃgraha Rāmāyaṇa*, was written by Rāmabrahmānanda, probably in the 17th century, as a comprehensive synthesis of all forms of the Rāma story (in token of which he gives a lengthy list of his sources). By now, however, the real dynamics of the culture were being expressed in the vernacular

⁵² See *Bhuśundi Rāmāyaṇa* 1975, also B. P. Singh 1980. Some manuscripts give the alternative titles *Ādi Rāmāyaṇa* and *Brahma Rāmāyaṇa*.

⁵³ The issue of its date really hinges on the direction of influence between it and the Marāthī *Bhāvārtha rāmāyaṇa* of Ekanātha (1533–99 A.D.), mentioned in the next section. A recent brief study is found in Vidyut Akujkar 1995.

literatures and so in the next section the impact of the epics on Indian culture as a whole, first in artistic forms and then in vernacular literature, is surveyed.

The place of the epics in Indian culture

The stories of the *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata* have been disseminated throughout India in many different versions and languages, in diverse artistic forms and with varied purposes. Sculptural representations are found on temples from perhaps as early as the 5th century A.D., miniature painters in the 16th–18th centuries frequently illustrated episodes from them, and even now puppeteers retell the stories. Above all, in many villages and towns across North India, the annual performance of the Rāmlīlā, a dramatic re-enactment of the Rāma story spread out over as much as a month, brings it to the illiterate masses, in a way comparable to the miracle and mystery plays of mediæval Europe. In the process, Rāma has been transformed from a martial hero into an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu, a factor which both explains and encourages the universal popularity of the story and the reverence now given to it and its chief figures. By contrast, the cult of Kṛṣṇa has long been separated from the *Mahābhārata*, the popularity of which has consequently often been somewhat less than that of the *Rāmāyaṇa*.

Apart from some reliefs in rock-cut caves at Undavalli tentatively assigned to the Viṣṇukuṇḍins (4th–5th centuries), the Gupta period saw the first sculptural representations of the *Rāmāyaṇa*: on a terracotta panel apparently from the 5th-century Bhītārgāon temple, showing Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa as forest dwellers; on a set of terracotta panels from Nacharkherha in Haryana; on stucco reliefs of scenes from the *Ayodhyākāṇḍa* set in niches on the temple at Aphṣad (perhaps 6th century); and on the Daśāvatāra temple at Deogarh in the 6th century, where a series of separate panels adds up to a narrative sequence, with one detached slab apparently showing Rāvaṇa offering his heads to Śiva (a variant of the *Uttarakāṇḍa* episode where he offers them to Brahmā).⁵⁴ There are several *Rāmāyaṇa* scenes on the walls

⁵⁴ See Vidya Dehejia 1994b: 9–10. On the reliefs at Undavalli see Rajendra Prasad 1980: 72, and on the detached slab at Deogarh apparently showing Rāvaṇa see Prithvi Kumar Agrawala 1994.

of the Patthara Ghati temple at Nālandā (7th–8th century). Early Orissan temples at Bhuvaneswar contain *Rāmāyaṇa* carvings, among them some small carvings below an image niche on the Śatruघneśvara temple (late 6th century—the names of the temples in this group bear no relation to their original dedication) and a narrative frieze on the Svarṇajāleśvara temple (early 7th century) which also includes the *Mahābhārata* episode of Arjuna's encounter with the Kirāta. The Sūrya temple at Modhera in Gujarat (11th century) has several *Mahābhārata* scenes on ceiling panels and on pillar niches.

In the south, the great carving of the scene identified either as Arjuna's Penance or as the Descent of the Gangā on a massive granite outcrop at Māmallapuram provides clear evidence for the prestige of the *Mahābhārata*, especially when account is taken of the earlier unfinished attempt nearby; both date from the time of the establishment of the port by the Pallava ruler, Narasiṁhavarman I Mahāmalla (c. 630–68 A.D.). A few *Rāmāyaṇa* scenes appear on the Kailāsanātha temple at Kāñcī, erected by Narasiṁhavarma II Rājasimha (c. 690–720 A.D.). At the same period, early Western Cālukya temples provide abundant examples of carved scenes taken from both the epics. There is a relief of the awakening of Kumbhakarṇa on the upper Śivālaya temple at Bādāmi of around 600 A.D. and there are, for example, reliefs of Rāvaṇa abducting Sītā, of Bhīṣma lying on his bed of arrows and of Arjuna fighting Śiva disguised as a Kirāta, as well as many other *Mahābhārata* scenes, on both the Mālegitti Śivālaya temple at Bādāmi and the Virūpākṣa temple at Paṭṭadakal; as is well known, the Virūpākṣa temple provided the inspiration for the Kailāsa temple at Elūrā excavated for the Rāṣṭrakūṭa ruler Kṛṣṇa I (third quarter of the 8th century).⁵⁵ The scenes from the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata* which cover the outer walls of the Pāpanātha temple at Paṭṭadakal (built during the reigns of the last three Western Cālukya rulers, in the first half of the 8th century) have been shown by Helen Wechsler to have been intended to bolster the dynasty's legitimacy.⁵⁶ Similarly, the widespread occurrence of *Rāmāyaṇa* relief cycles on early Cōla temples has been highlighted by David Sanford, who also suggests that the somewhat enigmatic figure sculptures in niches on the 9th-century Nāgeśvara temple at Kumbakonam should be identified as

⁵⁵ A study of the *Rāmāyaṇa* reliefs on the Kailāsa temple is contained in Adalbert Gail 1985.

⁵⁶ Wechsler 1994.

Rāmāyaṇa portraits.⁵⁷ The early Cōla ruler, Āditya I (871–907 A.D.) is incidentally known to have assumed the title, Kodanḍa Rāma.

The popularity of both epics, and also the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, as subjects for the relief friezes which decorate Hoysaḷa temples is too well known to need discussion.⁵⁸ Thereafter, in the Vijayanagara period the *Rāmāyaṇa* in particular was favoured for such representations, partly as a result of the traditional association of Anegondi, across the river Tungabhadra from the city of Vijayanagara, with the site of the Vānara capital, Kiṣkindhā, but also as part of the self-image of the rulers in their projection of themselves as champions of Hindu tradition; the reliefs on the royal Rāmacandra temple are particularly notable (with Krṣṇa reliefs based on the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* on the subsidiary shrine).⁵⁹ Temples dedicated to Rāma, such as the Rāmasvāmī temple at Kumbakonam and the Varajarāja temple at Kāñcī, were also built at this period and such traditions continue effectively to the present day with, for example, *Rāmāyaṇa* scenes painted on the ceiling and walls of the Vasantotsava maṇḍapa of the Alakar Kōyil just north of Madurai in the early 18th century and sequences of *Rāmāyaṇa* reliefs carved on the temple car and painted on the *prākāra* wall of the Rāmasvāmī temple at Kumbakonam in the 20th century.⁶⁰

In North India images of Rāma independent of a *Rāmāyaṇa* scene (though from niches on the walls, not as the cult object) are found first on the Pārśvanātha temple at Khajurāho (late 10th century: two images, one two-armed and one four-armed) and the Ambā Mātā temple at Osian (with Sītā in the style of a Lakṣmī-Nārāyaṇa). As already noted, the earliest known temple to Rāma is the Rājīvalocana temple at Rājim, first explicitly dedicated to Rāma in an inscription of 1144/5 A.D., although the temple as a Vaiṣṇava shrine is much older; another Kalacuri temple dedicated to Rāma, in Rewa near Makundpur, soon followed in 1193 A.D. Even at Rāmagiri (modern Rāmtek near Nagpur) a Rāma shrine is first explicitly mentioned in an inscription of the reign of the Yādava Rāmacandra I (1271–1310 A.D.), although the name of the hill itself and Kālidāsa's reference in the *Meghadūta* show that a fifth-century tradition linked it with a visit by Rāma and so there is the possibility that there

⁵⁷ See Sanford 1974 and 1994.

⁵⁸ The most recent discussion of them is found in Kirsti Evans 1997.

⁵⁹ For details see Anna Dallapiccola et al. 1992, also Dallapiccola 1994a.

⁶⁰ For details see G. Vijayavenugopal 1987 and Anna Dallapiccola 1994b.

existed some sort of Viṣṇupada or Rāmapada shrine already in the Vākataka period.⁶¹ However, the closeness of these dates to the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate in North India has prompted some scholars to view the rise of the Rāma cult as a reaction to Muslim rule; while it is clear that the growth in popularity of the concept of *rāmarājya* and their symbolic identification with Rāma by many rulers is related to this, the picture is more complex than this view suggests.⁶² Much later still in North India, illustrated manuscripts of both epics, but especially the *Rāmāyaṇa*, were produced under both Mughal and Rājput patronage; the most outstanding *Rāmāyaṇa* manuscript is undoubtedly that prepared for Jagat Singh I of Mevāṛ between 1649 and 1653, which contains some four hundred full-page paintings by such noted artists as Manohar and Sāhib Dīn—its lavish scale testifying to the significance of the project.

The earliest versions of the Rāma story in languages other than Sanskrit are Buddhist and Jain.⁶³ The *Dasaratha Jātaka*, as noted in chapter 7, gives a possibly independent version from Vālmīki but the main prose narrative is a Pāli translation of a 5th-century A.D. Sinhalese original. Jain versions in Prākrit and Apabhraṃśa are based on the Vālmīki *Rāmāyaṇa*, of which they are essentially reductionist critiques (thus indirectly testifying to its popularity, since it was felt so necessary to counter it); the main Prākrit version is Vimalasūri's *Paiumacariya* of perhaps the end of the 3rd century A.D., but in addition complete sections on it are included in, for example, Saṅghadāsa's *Vasudevahīṇḍi* (5th century) and Bhadreśvara's *Kahāvalī* (11th century), as well as in the Apabhraṃśa *Mahāpurāṇa* of Puṣpadanta (965 A.D.).⁶⁴ There is a tradition that Vimalasūri was also the author of the first

⁶¹ On Rāmagiri see the various articles published recently by Hans Bakker, especially Bakker 1991.

⁶² The most recent exponent of this view has been Pollock (1993 and 1995). The significance of the *Agastyasamhitā* (probably 12th century—one *adhyāya* is already quoted by Hemādri in his *Caturvargacintāmani* of 1260 A.D.) in laying down rules for the Rāma cult (thus establishing its existence by the 11th–12th century) is minimised by Pollock. Equally, due weight should be given to Sandhyākaranandin's *Rāmacarita*, implicitly but throughout identifying the Pāla king Rāmapāla (c. 1072–1126) with Rāma Dāśarathi, not just to the equation of Pṛthvirāja III with Rāma in the *Pṛthvīrājavijaya* of the late 12th century.

⁶³ On adaptations of the *Rāmāyaṇa* into other languages than Sanskrit see Brockington 1984: 260–306, also the many articles in Raghavan 1980 and K. R. Srivisava Iyengar 1983, and W. L. Smith 1988.

⁶⁴ The fullest treatment is in V. M. Kulkarni 1990.

Jain *Hariwamśa* but if so it is lost and the main one still extant is included in Śilāṅka's *Cauppanamahāpurisacaria*, written in 869 A.D.

In South India, there is some evidence of acquaintance with the story of Rāma and with the *Mahābhārata* in Tamil literature from the Caṅkam period or soon after.⁶⁵ By the Pallava period, there is inscriptive evidence (from the reign of Parameśvaravarman I, c. 670–700 A.D.) for temple reading of the *Mahābhārata* and it was translated into Tamil by a Peruntēvanār during Nandivarman III's reign (848–69 A.D.) as the *Pāratavēṇpā*, only part of which survives. The most outstanding version, however, is that of Villiputtūr Ālvār (probably late 14th century), who draws at times on Peruntēvanār but surpasses him in the quality of his work, which is also the version favoured by the Draupadī cult. While the Ālvārs knew the *Rāmāyaṇa* well and indeed Kulacēkara's poetry is full of the Rāma story, the best known and earliest extant adaptation of the *Rāmāyaṇa* is Kampan's *Irāmatāram*, appearing in the wake of the *bhakti* poetry of the Ālvārs (probably 10th century, perhaps as late as the 12th century) and showing the same attitude of fervent devotion: as its title indicates, Rāma is an *avatāra* sent to rid the world of Rākṣasas. Indeed, we already see in Kampan's work something of the emphasis on the name of Rāma which was to become so significant subsequently. It has achieved an exceptional status in Tamil literature for its literary qualities and its popularity has ensured its spread and its perpetuation in sometimes unexpected ways. One of these is the fact that Kampan's text forms the basis for the performances still put on in more than one hundred goddess temples in central Kerala by puppeteers at the annual festival, performances which lack the usually prominent *bhakti* element and are directed to the goddess as audience rather than to any bystanders.⁶⁶

Versions of both epics in the other Dravidian languages followed over the next few centuries, although versions of the *Rāmāyaṇa* tend to outnumber those of the *Mahābhārata*. In Telugu the *Āndhra Bhāratamu* was begun by Nannaya around 1025 A.D. and completed by Tikkana Somayājī and Errana in the 13th and 14th centuries. The first Telugu *Rāmāyaṇa* was the *Ranganātha Rāmāyaṇa*, usually thought to have been composed by Gona Buddha Reddi in the 13th century, which has

⁶⁵ On knowledge and translations of the epics in Tamil, see Kamil V. Zvelebil, 1974: 130–31 and 142–59, and 1992: 64–69, also Hiltebeitel 1988–91: I, 14–15 and, for Kampan's treatment of the Vālin episode, Shulman 1979a.

⁶⁶ See Stuart H. Blackburn 1996, also 1987 and 1991.

become one of the most popular works in the language (parts of it are used for the shadow-play, *tōlubommalāta*, as well as episodes from the *Āndhra Bhāratamu*); other significant Telugu adaptations are the *Bhāskara Rāmāyaṇa* of the same period, the *Molla Rāmāyaṇa* of the 14th or 15th century (by the low-caste female poet Molla), and the *Dvīpada Rāmāyaṇa* of Kāṭṭa Varadarāja Kavi in the middle of the 17th century, as well as several shorter works on *Rāmāyaṇa* themes. The sheer number is a clear testimony to the popularity of the Rāma story in Āndhra.

In Kannada the earliest version of the *Mahābhārata* was the Jain adaptation from the middle of the 10th century in *campū* form, known variously as the *Pampabhārata* and the *Vikramārjunavijayam* (which follows the original *Mahābhārata* rather than the existing Jain *Mahābhāratas* in Sanskrit or Prakrit) and similarly the earliest *Rāmāyaṇa* was the Jain *Pampa Rāmāyaṇa* of Abhinava Pampa (Nāgacandra) composed probably in the later 12th century. Subsequently, in the 15th century Kumāravyāsa produced his *Kṛṣṇabhakti* and in the 15th or 16th century Lakṣmiśa produced a Kannada version of the *Jaiminibhārata* which also includes within it an account of the banishment of Sītā and the birth of the twins, Kuśa and Lava. The greater number of adaptations of the *Rāmāyaṇa* compared with those of the *Mahābhārata* is illustrated by the tradition that Kumāravyāsa justified his composition of a vernacular *Mahābhārata* by declaring that there were already so many *Rāmāyaṇas* that the earth was sinking under their weight. The main Kannada *Rāmāyaṇa* versions are the *Torave Rāmāyaṇa* of Narahari alias Kumāra Vālmīki in the middle of the 17th century, that by Veṅkāmātya around 1770 A.D., which follows Vālmīki closely, and the *Kauśika Rāmāyaṇa* of Battatīsvāra from the same period. In Malayālam, although there were earlier versions of the *Rāmāyaṇa* (including Rāma Paṇikkar's *Kanṇaśa Rāmāyaṇam* from the 15th century), the best known is Ezuttaccan's *Attiyatuma Rāmāyaṇam* from the 16th century, which is based, as its name suggests, on the *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa* rather than on Vālmīki. Ezuttaccan also produced a condensed, creative adaptation of the *Mahābhārata* in Malayālam (for instance giving only the stories of Nala and of Rāma for the *Āranyakaparvan*).

In North India the first major adaptation of the *Rāmāyaṇa* into a modern language was that by Kṛttibās, probably composed early in the 15th century, to be followed by several other Bengālī versions:

by *Candrābatī* late in the 16th century, by *Adbhutācāryya* in the 17th century, by *Kabicandra* around 1700 and by *Jagadrāma* towards the end of the 18th century.⁶⁷ Because of its great popularity, *Kṛttibās*'s version has absorbed several episodes from these later versions.⁶⁸ The most popular *Mahābhārata* version in Bengālī is the *Pāñdavbijay* of *Kāśīrāmdās* from the middle of the 17th century, which adopts a fairly simple approach but one strongly influenced by devotion to Kṛṣṇa. However, the first poet to treat a *Mahābhārata* theme was *Parameśvārdās* (c. 1500) and there are numerous other translations into Bengālī.

One of the earliest vernacular versions of the *Mahābhārata* is the Oriya adaptation by *Śāralādās* in the third quarter probably of the 15th century, which presents a vigorous narrative, devoid of the philosophical elements but drawing also on oral traditions; it was followed by three other, less popular Oriya versions. The best known Oriya *Rāmāyaṇa* is the *Jagamohana Rāmāyaṇa* (also known as *Dāṇḍi Rāmāyaṇa*) of *Balarāmdās*. *Balarāmdās* composed his work about forty years after *Śāralādās'* *Mahābhārata* and it seems to have been completed in 1504; the poem has four different narrators and includes most of the material in the NE recension of the Vālmīki *Rāmāyaṇa* but also draws on the *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa* and to some extent on Bengālī Rāma traditions. There are many subsequent versions of the *Rāmāyaṇa* in Oriya: there are several works entitled *Tikā Rāmāyaṇa* and claiming to be a summary of *Balarāmdās'* work; there are five versions of the *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa*; *Siddheśvārdās* composed a *Vilankā Rāmāyaṇa* probably in the 17th century, which prominently includes the *Adbhuta Rāmāyaṇa* story of the thousand-headed Rāvaṇa killed by Sītā; and early in the 18th century *Upendra Bhañja* wrote several highly elaborate works on *Rāmāyaṇa* themes. In Orissa, too, the

⁶⁷ Philippe Benoît (1988) makes a stylistic comparison between the Vālmīki *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Kṛttibās*' version with particular reference to the *Sundarakāṇḍa* and emphasises the popular and realistic aspects of *Kṛttibās*' treatment by comparison with the literary effects of the Vālmīki *Rāmāyaṇa*.

⁶⁸ Another of the Bengālī *Rāmāyaṇas*, the *Bisṇupūri Rāmāyaṇa* of Śaṅkara *Kabicandra*, attests the acceptance of the concept not merely of multiple *Rāmāyaṇas* but also of multiple Rāmas with its story of how Hanumān goes to the underworld to retrieve Rāma's ring, only to be invited to take his pick from a pile of rings, each of which had belonged to a Rāma in successive *kalpas* (cf. W. L. Smith 1988: 11; a similar oral tradition in Hindi is recorded by Ramanujan 1991b: 23–24). This is analogous to the common motif, first recorded in the *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa*, of Sītā clinching her arguments to be allowed to accompany Rāma into exile by asking whether, in any of the many *Rāmāyaṇas* told, Rāma ever went without Sītā.

Rāmlīlā is performed but, unlike that in the Hindī-speaking areas which is based on Tulsīdās's work, it uses one or other of the Oriya versions (often the *Vicitra Rāmāyaṇa* of Viśvanātha Khuntiā, c. 1710 A.D.) and is performed in the two weeks following Rāmnavamī (in March or April).⁶⁹

Episodes from the *Mahābhārata* form the subject of various Assamese works, the *Jayadrathbadh* by Kaviratna Sarasvatī (based on Mbh. 7.121), the *Babrubāhar Yuddha* by Harivara Vipra (based on Mbh. 14.78) and the *Sātyaki Praveśa* (based on Mbh. 7.85); these were followed by more Kṛṣṇa-oriented versions by Śaṅkaradeva and by Rāma Sarasvatī in the 16th century. The two most significant versions in Marāṭhī are those by Mukteśvar and by Moropant (1729–94), while one of the earliest works in Marāṭhī is Jñānadēva's voluminous commentary on the *Bhagavadgītā*, commonly called the *Jñānēśvarī* (completed according to tradition in 1290 A.D.), and Śridhar (1689–1729) produced free literary adaptations of both epics, the *Rāmavijaya* and the *Pāñḍavapratāpa*. Under the Mughal emperor Akbar, a Persian translation of the *Mahābhārata* was commissioned from Nakib Khān and others in 1582, the *Razm Nāma*, and Akbar also commissioned Abdul Qadir Bada'uni to translate the *Rāmāyaṇa* in 1585 (this is one of six translations into Persian, the first dating from 1334)—the lavishly illustrated imperial presentation copies with 168 and 176 paintings respectively by many of the finest Mughal artists are now in the Jaipur royal collection. *Rāmāyanas* in other North Indian languages include the Assamese adaptation by Mādhava Kandali in the 14th century, the Gujarātī version by Girdhar (written in 1837 and ousting no less than three from the 16th century), a Rājasthānī *Rāmāyaṇa* by Mehojī (early 16th century), the *Rāmāvatār* of Gurū Gobind Singh, and Eknāth's *Bhāvārtha Rāmāyaṇa* in Marāṭhī (Eknāth also composed the *Eknāthī Bhāgavata*, an adaptation of part of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*). Eknāth's version, though left incomplete at his death in 1599, is the earliest and probably the best known in Marāṭhī, giving the story a strong *bhakti* emphasis and developing the theme of *rāmarājya*, but other versions have enjoyed some popularity, including the *Mantra Rāmāyanas* of Moropant,⁷⁰ while those composed in the 17th century by Rāmdās, Śivājī's guru, appropriate the story in the service of a Marāṭhā nationalism directed against Islamic rule.

⁶⁹ A recent account of such Rāmlilās is contained in Joanna Williams 1996: 30–38.

⁷⁰ For a recent study see Indumati Armelin 1988.

In Hindī, of course, Tulsīdās's Avadhī *Rāmcaritmānas* has become by far the best known *Rāmāyaṇa* version, although it was in fact preceded by the Brajbhāṣā *Rāmāyaṇakathā* of Viṣṇudās composed from 1442 onwards at Gwalior;⁷¹ Viṣṇudās also composed a *Pāñdavacarit* based on the *Mahābhārata* from 1435. Tulsīdās (probably 1543–1623) was eclectic in his use of sources and drew extensively on the *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa*, as well as making use of the *Yogavāsiṣṭha* and the *Bhuśundi Rāmāyaṇa* among other texts. From their influence not only on Tulsīdās but also on other vernacular authors, the *Yogavāsiṣṭha* and the *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa* are clearly significant for the *bhakti* tradition. Tulsīdās is most notable for his stress on the name of Rāma and in his prologue to the *Rāmcaritmānas* he carefully justifies his exaltation of the divine Name, which for him is the essence of the supreme deity and has immense saving power. For Tulsī the ideal state of *rāmarājya*, dependent on Rāma's actual rule for its global realisation, was accessible to the individual in this Kali Yuga through his saving name.⁷² Tulsīdās also displays a particular fondness for Hanumān, in keeping with his own *dāsyu* attitude, but Hanumān's significance within the story had long been growing, just as Laksmaṇa had increasingly been marginalised. Hanumān's popularity as an independent figure has clearly contributed to this, but an important factor is the extent to which in his whole-hearted service to Rāma, despite his all too human failings of forgetfulness and lack of application, he provides a model for the ordinary worshipper. In his *Vinayapatrikā* Tulsīdās appeals to Hanumān to act as his intermediary in presenting his petition at Rāma's court; this mediatory role has become still more prominent in popular devotion, further increasing the appeal of the Rāma story.

Modern Indian writers, including those writing in English, have drawn on both epics for some of their themes. A few examples must suffice to indicate the extent of this influence. Michael Madhusudan Datta's *Meghnādbadh kābya* (1861) centres on the killing of Indrajit but tells much of the *Rāmāyaṇa* story and in Miltonic fashion gives rather the best of it to Rāvaṇa. Rabindranath Tagore used *Mahābhārata* themes in several of his dramas: *Chitra* (inspired by the Śakuntalā story), *Gāndhārī's Prayer*, and *Karṇa and Kuntī* (a rather free adaptation of the

⁷¹ For a full study, see R. S. McGregor 1991a. There was also a contemporary Brajbhāṣā version, the *Ramacandracandrikā* of 1601 A.D. by Keśavdās. This and the next few paragraphs are adapted from Brockington 1993: 8–11.

⁷² For a recent comparison of the concept of *rāmrājya* in Kampaī and Tulsīdās see A. G. Menon and G. H. Schokker 1992.

episode where Kuntī reveals to Karṇa that he is her son). In 1928 Vasudeva Rao published a play in English blank verse, *Nala and Damayantī*. T. P. Kailasam's *Fulfilment* is based on the story of Ekalavya (Mbh. 1.123) and his *Karṇa, the Brahman's Curse* presents Karṇa very much as the victim of fate. Aurobindo Ghose composed his lengthy *Sāvitrī* over a lengthy period as an allegory of the soul's journey to truth. Shashi Tharoor's bulky *The Great Indian Novel* even manages to turn the *Mahābhārata* into a satire on recent Indian politics.

A measure of the popularity of Tulsī's *Rāmcaritmānas* is seen in the fact that in Hindī-speaking areas it is the text *par excellence* for the Rāmlilā, staged annually at Daśahrā in most of North India and even now a popular religious institution. Its enactment of the story in dramatic form has obviously been a potent force in shaping the nature of popular religion; the extent to which each local community is involved in the organisation and in the acting is of great significance. The technique most commonly employed—where the recitation of the text takes priority, and the acting and dialogue highlight particular events—has evidently formed a most effective means of spreading devotion to Rāma as well as a universal awareness of the story. Yet, paradoxically, the celebration has no strong sectarian connections and so is open to all, with the result that Rām has become one of the commonest names for the deity in North India (a trend that seems to predate Tulsīdās and the Rāmlilā). Thus, although Tulsīdās himself had links with the Rāmānandīs, his great legacy was the vision of Rāma's righteous rule and the saving power of his name available to all. The trend towards employing his *Rāmcaritmānas* as the pre-eminent text for public performance—whether in the Rāmlilā or in the various types of Rāmāyaṇakathā—seems to have grown stronger from the 18th century onwards, influenced in varying degrees by the resurgence of Hindu kingdoms after the disintegration of the Mughal empire, the increasing influence of the Rāmānandī ascetic order, the growing wealth of merchant families and the emergence of a more consciously Hindu identity in reaction to British rule.⁷³

The increasing ritualisation of Tulsīdās's work is seen in the development, especially in Varanasi, of cycles of formal recitation of the

⁷³ On the techniques of recitation and exposition of the *Rāmcaritmānas* and on the Rāmlilā, the latest major publication is Philip Lutgendorf 1991a. On the Rāmlilā see also Bonnemaison and Macy 1990, Linda Hess 1983, 1988 and 1994, and William Sax 1990–91.

Rāmcaritmānas as an equivalent to ‘sacrifice’. Thus, since 1955, a charitable trust has sponsored a nine-day programme of nightly *kathā* performances by noted expounders at Gyan Vapi in Varanasi; this is constructed around a ritual recitation of the entire *Rāmcaritmānas*, conducted each morning by a group of brāhmaṇ specialists and so designated as a *Śrī Rāmcaritmānas navāḥ pāṭh mahāyajña*, ‘a great sacrifice of nine-day recitation of the *Rāmcaritmānas*’. The purely textual aspect is augmented by an elaborate tableau of life-size images representing the culminating scene of the story as recounted by Tulsīdās, in which the victorious Rāma is enthroned by his three brothers, helped by Hanumān and Vasiṣṭha; *āratī* ceremonies are then regularly performed before this tableau. This festival has not only itself become an annual event but has also served as a model for similar events elsewhere in North India. These are both an index of the popularity of Tulsī’s work and an attempt by various groups to exploit its perceived popularity. Influenced by the tradition of public recitation of the Purāṇas, this new tradition takes some features of Vedic rituals but reshapes them around a more familiar text. The ritual specialists are conspicuous but the focus of the event is not the fire-altar but the copy of the *Rāmcaritmānas*, whose verses are treated almost like mantras. This desire to give the work the ultimate status of equivalence with the Vedas may nevertheless in the long run lead to its fossilisation and eventually to its losing appeal. It also marks a step away from direct participation in its performance, with the audience as mere passive spectators rather than entering into the spirit of the action.⁷⁴ The wide appeal of the *Rāmcaritmānas* is further attested by the group of young Kṛṣṇa devotees in Mathura, on whom Norvin Hein reports, who formed a society, the Rāmāyaṇ Samkīrtan Samiti, in order to undertake together a complete reading over three months of Tulsīdās’ great poem.⁷⁵

Apart from the Rāmlilā, the best known folk dramas are probably the Rāslilās in North India, especially in Braj, which are based on

⁷⁴ The material of this paragraph is based on Philip Lutgendorf, 1991a: 80–96, cf. also 1989 and 1991b. The text has been fixed and rendered static in an even more literal way in the Tulsi Manas Temple in Varanasi, built in the mid 1960s, which—among various unusual features—has inscribed on its inside walls the complete text of the *Rāmcaritmānas*. In imitation of this, in the 1970s, an Ayodhyā *mahant* secured funds to build a Valmiki Bhavan at Ayodhyā, which similarly contains the 24,000 *ślokas* of the Vālmiki *Rāmāyaṇa* (but is in fact frequently used for recitation performances of the *Rāmcaritmānas*).

⁷⁵ Hein, Norvin 1990.

Kṛṣṇa's youth among the cowherds (and thus are based at some remove on the *Harivamśa*) and which have been so ably studied by Norvin Hein.⁷⁶ Like the Rāmlilās, the Rāslilās have tended to express the high caste traditions of brāhmaṇas and rulers. Drama cycles which are directly based on the *Mahābhārata* are both less common and less well known, with their sponsorship coming often from the dominant landed castes. Following the recent work by Hiltzebeitel, the South Indian Draupadī cult and its festivals are becoming better known and these involve a mixture of drama, recitation and ritual.⁷⁷ At the opposite end of the country, there are found the broadly similar Pāñdavlilās of Garhwal, sponsored by local Rājputs, who claim descent from the Pāñdavas and regard them as their personal deities; for them Draupadī is an *avatāra* of Kālī.⁷⁸ In the Yakṣagana drama form in Karnataka, stories from both epics are staged and one particular type, Tale Maddale, incorporates a tradition of folk debate, somewhat similar to that in the Kerala puppet theatre based on Kampai's *Irāmāvatāram*. The extent to which the epics have interacted with the folk tradition is becoming more widely recognised and there have been a number of recent studies on, for example, the story of the thousand-headed Rāvaṇa in Tamil folk narrative, the folk motif of Mahīrāvaṇa in eastern India and of Mayilirāvaṇan, 'Peacock Rāvaṇa' in Tamil, *patuyā* songs in Bengal on the *Rāmāyaṇa*, a folk *Mahābhārata* in Rājasthānī, women's songs in Madhya Pradesh and in Andhra Pradesh based on the *Rāmāyaṇa*, and many more.⁷⁹ The influence of the epics at the folk level is more extensive still, since totally unrelated stories may use names or plot elements derived from the epics. This is a good illustration of the way that the epics have become a kind of narrative language, which is also charged with considerable symbolic significance.

There is often, of course, a political element involved in festivals and in folk songs (which may well be protest songs), just as there was in the sculptural programmes of temples noted earlier. In more modern times, the importance of their patronage of the Ramnagar Rāmlilā in projecting the image of the Mahārājas of Kāśī from the time of

⁷⁶ Hein 1992 (this also includes significant discussion of the Rāmlilā and its origins).

⁷⁷ Alf Hiltzebeitel 1988–91: I–II.

⁷⁸ See William S. Sax 1995.

⁷⁹ See for example David Shulman 1986 (a revised version of Shulman 1979b), William Smith 1982, Mary Brockington 1995a (also 1995b), Kamil Zvelebil 1987, Dieter Kapp 1991, Philippe Benoît 1992, John D. Smith 1990, Joyce Flueckiger 1991, and Velcheru Narayana Rao 1991.

Udit Narayan (1796–1835) onwards is well documented (and buttressed by the tradition that Ramnagar is built on the site where Vyāsa composed the *Mahābhārata*). Similarly, after the staunchly Vaiṣṇava Dogra Rajput Gulab Singh of Jammu had added the strongly Śaiva Kashmir to his territories (1846–56), his successor Ranbir Singh sought to introduce Rāma worship into Kashmir, as part of the strengthening of political control, by introducing festivals such as the Baldev festival and building temples to Rāma and Hanumān.⁸⁰ Conversely, in South India the emphasis has often been reversed, for reasons of regional nationalism. One of the early and influential individuals to take such a view, interpreting Tamil culture as a struggle against Aryan domination, was M. S. Purnalingam Pillai (1866–1947), who in 1928 published a book with the title *Ravana the Great*.⁸¹ Indeed, in the 1950s leaders of the Dravidian movement such as C. N. Annadurai, later the founder of the DMK, were suggesting that Kampan’s work should be burnt, and E. V. Ramasami, the author from 1930 onwards of several tracts criticising the *Rāmāyaṇa*, actually organised a public burning of pictures of Rāma on 1st August 1956 in Madras (now Chennai).⁸² This has since resulted in works of literature with this outlook, for example the play in Malayālam by C. N. Srikantan Nayar, *Lankālakṣmi*, published in 1976.⁸³ There is, however, a certain inconsistency in Tamil nationalist rewriting of the Rāma story to make Rāvaṇa its hero on the basis that he is a South Indian, since he is also a brāhmaṇa, whereas Rāma is a *kṣatriya*, and Tamil nationalism is as much anti-brāhmaṇa as anti-Aryan.

Also in the 20th century the concept of *rāmarājya* has been politicised in a wider nationalist context, not only in its last quarter by the Bharatiya Janata Party but also by other movements earlier; indeed, appeal to the Rāma story, especially Hanumān, in such a context can be found as early as 1877, in a speech made by the writer Hariścandra at Ballia.⁸⁴ The Kisan Sabha movement, which formed the organisational base of the peasant revolt which broke out in the Avadh area in 1920, was permeated by the influence of Tulsīdās’s

⁸⁰ For details see Madhu Bazas Wangu 1992.

⁸¹ For some discussion see Zvelebil 1988.

⁸² See Paula Richman 1991b.

⁸³ See Clifford Hospital 1991.

⁸⁴ See Stuart McGregor 1991b. The appeal of Hanumān to Hindu militancy may well be one factor in the recent vogue for the erection of colossal images of Hanumān, although his role as an easily propitiated intermediary is at least as

Rāmcaritmānas, and the peasants made faith in the liberating power of Rāma's name the centre of their movement, using as their rallying cry the greeting 'Sītā-Rām'. Their grievances were the result of excessive exactions by their landlords. The revolt was not supported by the nationalist leaders, much of whose support came from the landlords; Congress suggested instead that landlords and peasants should be presenting a united front (the reactionary reading of *rāmarājya*), while the peasants themselves were seeking a fairer distribution of wealth (the radical, even millennial, reading of *rāmarājya*). Gandhi too presented a vision of *Rāmrāj* based on his intimate acquaintance with the *Rāmcaritmānas* and it forms a recurring theme in his writings, often linked with the term *svarāj* used more by other Congress leaders. He insisted on reading the 'spirit' rather than the letter of the *Rāmcaritmānas* and so could claim '*Rāmrāj* means rule of the people.'⁸⁵ A much more literalist interpretation was that of Svāmī Karpātrī (Hariharanand Sarasvati, 1907–82), who advocated the revival of large-scale Vedic sacrifices, opposed the opening of temples to untouchables, and founded the Ram Rajya Parishad in 1948. The party's manifesto for the 1952 election, full of Sanskrit quotations and moral exhortations, extolled the blessed days of Lord Rāma and the merits of a largely rural economy based on the *jajmānī* system, and called for the abolition of cow slaughter and a ban on alcohol. Its evocation of Rāma's glorious reign resembled Tulsīdās' picture, which in turn is based on the close of the *Yuddhakānda* of the Vālmīki *Rāmāyaṇa*. However, by the 1980s the upsurge in militant Hindu nationalism had led to something rather different: the symbol of the 'caged Rām' exploited by the Vishva Hindu Parishad in support of its claim that the government gave preferential treatment to religious minorities, but with unmistakable undertones of the long-standing Bābri Masjid/Rām-janmabhūmi dispute, used so emotively by the Bharatiya Janata Party in the next decade to whip up feeling against Muslims. In the wake of the demolition of the Bābri Masjid on 6th December 1992 by *karsevaks*, more than three thousand people were killed in the communal rioting of the next two months across India, a worse carnage even than that stirred up by the *rathyātrā* undertaken by L. K. Advani, then president of the Bharatiya Janata Party, in

significant for his current popularity (cf. Lutgendorf 1993–94). The developments sketched in the rest of this paragraph have been the subject of worthwhile studies by Philip Lutgendorf (1995) and Peter van der Veer (1995).

⁸⁵ Gandhi 1958–84: XLIX, 92.

October 1990. The emotive power of the *Rāmāyaṇa* story was demonstrated very clearly in this deplorable development.

The development of television in India (particularly following the screening of the ASIAD held in Delhi in 1982, which inaugurated colour television and also a degree of commercial sponsorship) saw the advent of a greater number of entertainment programmes of several different kinds, which significantly included serialisations of both the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata*—in that order. Thus, both epics in turn received what by today's values might be seen as the ultimate accolade: a serialisation on television. Both were screened on Sunday mornings, when they would attract the largest numbers of viewers.

Every Sunday at 9.30 from 25th January 1987 till 31st July 1988 millions watched round their own or communal television sets as successive episodes of the *Rāmāyaṇa* were screened.⁸⁶ Produced and directed by the Bombay film-maker Ramanand Sagar, the *Rāmāyaṇa* serial itself was an epic undertaking, featuring some three hundred actors. Long before the showing of the main story ended on 31st July 1988, the *Rāmāyaṇa* had become the most popular programme ever shown on Indian television, drawing an estimated one hundred million viewers (as well as generating unprecedented advertising revenues, estimated at a tenth of Doordarshan's monthly income). In many parts of the country, activities were interrupted and streets and bazaars were emptied on Sunday mornings, as people gathered before their own or neighbours' television sets.

The Doordarshan series claims to present the standard version based on judicious selection from the variants in different versions; thus, in some degree it represents a superseding of the regional versions of the *Rāmāyaṇa* by a new all-India tradition. Its producer, Ramanand Sagar, declared in a newspaper interview that his main sources were Vālmīki's *Rāmāyaṇa* and Tulsīdās's *Rāmacaritmānas* and amplified his claim to have read all available versions by explicit reference to Rāgopalachari's English version, Raiganātha's Telugu version, Eknāth's *Bhāvārtha Rāmāyaṇa* and versions in Bengālī, Kannada and Hindi.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ The original plan had been for 52 episodes but the success of the series (it was estimated to attract a hundred million viewers) was such that it was extended to 78 episodes, plus a sequel screened after an interval of several months covering the events of the *Uttarakānda*.

⁸⁷ *Sakāl*, Friday 2nd October 1987, p. 20.

Similarly, the series credits invoke the regional traditions in Tamil, Marāṭhī, Telugu, Bengālī, Kannada, Malayālam, Urdu and Hindī. Both points should no doubt be interpreted as a claim to universal validity for this television version and an attempt to forestall possible criticism that Hindī was once again being preferred over other languages, since the production is in reality heavily dependent on Tulsīdās. The narrative recitation is almost exclusively based on the *Rāmcaritmānas*, which is enacted at the same time on screen in a manner which is clearly indebted to Rāmlilā traditions. There is a marked contrast between the somewhat archaic but powerful language of the recitation and the colloquial and pedestrian language of the dialogues and occasional lines of song uttered by the actors.

However, the marketing of the Rāma story in this way has its defects. Sagar presents himself as an authentic interpreter of the tradition and a kind of guardian of morals, implicitly and at times fairly explicitly appealing to religious feelings. Yet Rāma is shown as essentially a great man, a *mahāmāna*, as Sagar terms him in connection with the Ahalyā episode, one of the few miracles in the *Rāmāyana* in his estimation, where he compares Rāma's act with Christ saving a fallen woman and with episodes from the lives of the Buddha, Muhammad and the Sikh Gurus. This is not just universalisation but, as Vasudha Dalmia-Lüderitz has put it, 'Hinduism in a secular garb, claiming to speak for all mankind. The religious in it is largely reduced to social stereotypes and ideals: the virtuous wife, the dutiful daughter, the obedient son, the modest undemanding father-in-law, the great man; as against: the fallen woman, the bad mother, the arrogant sage. Ultimately, the secular version contradicts the claims of the texts it purports to illustrate.'⁸⁸

It may have encouraged the trend away from participation in a definite religious occasion to a more passive and impersonal, consumer-oriented style. The contrast between audience involvement in the actual performance of the Rāmlilā or in Rāmkathā and the mere watching of the television serial is substantial, even if many who watched tried to bridge this gulf by actions such as garlanding the television set. If this trend towards a more passive and impersonal approach continues, the vitality of the tradition may well decline in the long run. Certainly, the epidemic of 'Ramayan fever' (as *India Today* called it) generated lively debate in the press, with urban

⁸⁸ Dalmia-Lüderitz 1991: 225–26.

intellectuals and policymakers struggling to understand why a production dismissed by critics as a second-rate and technically flawed melodrama had elicited such a staggering response. On the other hand Philip Lutgendorf notes the show's continuities with the older style of *Rāmaritmānas* performance: the serialised format, the presence of a storyteller/commentator (usually Ramananad Sagar himself), the alternation between actors' dialogues and sung narration, and the imaginative and extended elaboration on individual incidents and characters—all reminiscent of the conventions and interpretative styles of *kathā* and *tīlā* performances.⁸⁹ He argues that the audience too responded appropriately—purifying and garlanding the TV set (as a seat for the video *vyās*), performing the *āratī* of beloved characters, and distributing *prasād* at the end of broadcasts—and so for him the production and the response it produced once again demonstrated the role of the epic as a principal medium not only for individual and collective religious experience but also for public discourse and social and cultural reflection. In the short run, certainly, the production of the television serial, the emergence of the *yajñā* format, the opening of new temples to Rāma, all attest the continuing and indeed growing popularity of the Rāma story. In a different way, the amount of scholarly interest shown recently in the *Rāmāyaṇa* in all its aspects also attests its continuing significance and popularity; there has been a regular series of International Conferences on the *Rāmāyaṇa*, as well as other smaller-scale conferences, with volumes of proceedings published already from several of them.⁹⁰

Subsequently, the *Mahābhārata* filled the slot left vacant by the earlier televising of the *Rāmāyaṇa* with a total of 93 episodes spread over a year and a half. When it ended in July 1990, a newspaper poll reported that nearly 92% of television viewers in India were watching the serial, which is an even higher viewing level than that reached by the earlier screening of the *Rāmāyaṇa*.⁹¹ B. R. Chopra, its director, made use of the standard techniques of the Bombay film industry in its

⁸⁹ Lutgendorf 1990.

⁹⁰ Proceedings of most of the International *Rāmāyaṇa* Conferences have been published, as have for example those of the Seminar on the *Rāmāyaṇa* at Tirupati in 1965 (Sreekrishna Sarma 1967) and the Conference on Contemporary *Rāmāyaṇa* Traditions held at St. Augustin, Germany, in September 1987 (Thiel-Horstmann 1991). Perhaps the most striking illustration of the sheer volume of material relating to the *Rāmāyaṇa* is that the *Inventory* (1991) lists 5581 items. Another important bibliographic source is the *Bibliography* (1992), which is annotated and has full indexes.

⁹¹ See Ananda Mitra 1993.

production, which is somewhat quicker in pace than the televised *Rāmāyana* and slightly less sentimental. However, as with the *Rāmāyana*, this Doordarshan production tended to give currency to a specific set of practices, implicitly projecting them as the dominant and preferred practices and so marginalising others that were not represented. In particular, the reproduction of the familiar text of the *Mahābhārata* undoubtedly emphasised the centrality of Hindu practices in describing the cultural values of India as a nation. This is no doubt one of the causes for the very different reception of the Indian and European television/film versions of the *Mahābhārata* for, although both were made in the 1980s on the basis of the original Sanskrit epic, they differ greatly as far as their content and form are concerned.

The televised *Mahābhārata* devoted three episodes (amounting to three hours of broadcast time, two and a quarter hours on the video version without commercials) to the *Bhagavadgītā*, which contrasts markedly with the Peter Brook version where it is disposed of in about seven minutes. Within these three episodes, 46 verses of the original text are recited in Sanskrit; 25 of these come from chapters 2 and 3 of the *Bhagavadgītā*, with half of them in the second episode. The weighting towards these chapters clearly reveals the emphasis placed on the yogic aspects of its teachings, for the concepts of *karmayoga*, *lokasaṃgraha* and sacrifice are dealt with at some length, before a sudden shift to the *bhakti* level and Kṛṣṇa's revelation of himself as the deity.⁹²

The epics as part of world culture

The spread of both epics eastwards from India is dramatic and occurred from an early date, whereas their spread westwards has been more restricted and also very recent. Versions of both the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyana* are important works of Old Javanese literature, early enough to be significant as witnesses for the text of the original Sanskrit versions. Elsewhere, the *Rāmāyana* has often been more popular than the *Mahābhārata*, for the same reasons as within India. Simply on the basis of this spread to SE Asia, the epics would have to be reckoned among the classics of world literature, even before consideration of their further impact.

⁹² This paragraph is based on Angelika Malinar 1995.

The story of the *Rāmāyaṇa* has been disseminated as far as Japan, in many different versions and languages, in diverse artistic forms and with varied purposes. Sculptural representations are found on temples from an early date and puppeteers recreate the story not only in India itself but as far away as Bali. In south Vietnam, the ancient Champa, there is a 7th-century temple to Vālmīki and an inscription there mentions both the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *avatāras* of Viṣṇu. Relief sculptures of almost the entire *Rāmāyaṇa* story are carved on the walls of the Candi Lara Jonggrang temple at Prambanan in Central Java, belonging to the middle of the 9th century. Sculptures of *Rāmāyaṇa* scenes are found in the northwestern corner of the great temple complex of Angkor Vat, constructed by Sūryavarman II (1112–1152 A.D.), while the Baphuon temple is also decorated with reliefs from the Rāma story. Old Khmer epigraphy, in the 6th–14th centuries, demonstrates knowledge of the *Rāmāyaṇa* at the Khmer court, though not revealing its extent. In Burma there are representations of Rāma in sculpture and temple plaques from the 11th century onward.

So great has the significance of the *Rāmāyaṇa* grown, that there are not merely Hindu versions (both Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva), but also Buddhist, Jain and even Muslim versions in different parts of SE Asia. The Old Javanese *Rāmāyaṇa Kakawin* of Yogiśvara from the early 10th century is only a little later than the first sculptural evidence there; the first two thirds are closely modelled on Bhaṭṭi's *Rāvaṇavadha* but the remainder derives from several sources. Elsewhere, the extant texts are substantially later than the first inscriptive or sculptural evidence for the story; this is in marked contrast to East Asia, to which the story was transmitted along the land routes for traders, with the first two Chinese versions dating to the middle of the 3rd century and the third quarter of the 5th (and the first Japanese version appearing in a 10th-century collection of popular tales). The earliest Khmer version of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, *Rāmakerti I*, belongs to the Middle Period (16th–17th centuries) and was followed by several others, all showing the influence of Buddhist beliefs and making Rāma in effect a Bodhisattva. A Malay version, the *Hikāyat Sri Rāma*, is a popular version transmitted orally to Indonesia between the 13th and 17th centuries, in part from South India, and exists in several recensions with considerable evidence of Muslim influence. The oldest Laotian version is the *Phra Lak Phra Lam*, composed between the 18th and mid-19th century, cast in the form of a Buddhist Jātaka, and given a local setting. Although the Rāma story seems to have been known in Thailand before the coming

of the T'ai from Yunnan in the 13th century, the first extant version is that commissioned by Rāma I, the first ruler of the Bangkok period, and completed in 1797, the *Rāmakīn*. In Burma the oldest extant version is the *Rama Thagyin* of 1775, composed by U Aung Phyoe and based on a dramatic performance by Thai captives brought back after the Burmese conquest of Ayuthaya in 1767. The story has even spread as far as the Philippines, where a Maranao text called *Maharadia Lawana* takes its name from Rāvaṇa and can be dated in the 17th–19th centuries.⁹³

Among the earliest evidence both for the text and for the prestige of the *Mahābhārata* in SE Asia is the Sanskrit inscription on a stele at Văt Luong Kău, which records the foundation of a *tīrtha* named Kurukṣetra on the Mekong river in modern Laos by a local ruler; it is undated but Georges Coedès, who published it, thought that it could not be later than the second half of the 5th century. Its particular interest is that it includes three *ślokas* which seem to derive directly from the *Tīrthayātraparvan* of the *Āranyakaparvan* (specifically from 3.81.173–6).⁹⁴ There is almost as early evidence from the archipelago, where the Yūpa pillars of King Mūlavarman in eastern Borneo (c. 400 A.D.) show awareness of both epics. The influence of the *Mahābhārata* is also apparent in Khmer literature and art (most notably in the bas-reliefs on the walls of the first-storey galleries at Angkor Vat), in the Old Javanese *Mahābhārata* (some at least of which had been translated before the end of the 10th century, and which forms an important witness for the text of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*) and the *Bhārata-Yuddha* (composed early in the 12th century by Seḍah and Panuluh, and based on the events of the *Udyoga* to *Śalya parvans*), the Malay *Hikāyat Pāñdawa Djaya* and numerous *wayang* adaptations of individual episodes, and even a summary in Pahlavi, which survives in its Arabic translation, the *Mujmalū'-t-Tawarikh*.

These various adaptations of the epics have indeed been popular as the subjects of the shadow plays which are so frequent a theatrical form in SE Asia, especially in Java, where many plays on the Rāma and Pāñdava stories are performed in the Wayang Kulit, with the traditional leather puppets, and also in the Wayang Golek, which uses solid

⁹³ In addition to the secondary literature cited in Brockington 1984: 286–306, and the articles in Raghavan 1980 and Srinivasa Iyengar 1983, the following items may be noted: Laurie Sears 1984, Saveros Pou 1986 and 1989, S. Singaravelu 1985–86.

⁹⁴ See Georges Coedès 1956 and Claude Jacques 1962.

wooden puppets in the round. The *wayang* tradition is clearly mentioned already in the Old Javanese *Arjunavivāha*, composed in the 11th century, and even in an 8th-century inscription in Old Balinese. Shadow plays are also known in Sumatra, Malacca, Kelantan, Kedah and Thailand. As objects found in art or ethnography museums in the West, such puppets have played some small part in making at least the existence of the epics known to the ordinary public in the West.

The first stages of European and then American awareness of the Sanskrit epics have already been outlined in the first section of chapter 2, with the earliest translations into English of first the *Bhagavadgītā* and then the first part of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. What was not mentioned there, since the work had no impact on later scholarship, is that almost certainly the first translation of the *Bhagavadgītā* into a modern European language was made into Polish by Stanisław Grochowski in 1611, indirectly from a Latin translation by his contemporary, an Italian named Francisco Benci.⁹⁵ As already noted, the first English translation by Charles Wilkins appeared in 1785 and it was soon re-translated into French, German and Russian—indeed, it probably had greater impact through these translations than with an English readership. Although it attracted relatively little notice at the time in Britain, it had rather more impact in America, especially on the ‘New England Transcendentalists’, Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau; indeed, Thoreau was sufficiently impressed by the epics to translate into English the French translation of the *Harivamśa* by Langlois, while the first verse of Emerson’s poem ‘Brahma’ is based on a verse from the *Bhagavadgītā* (it occurs also in the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* but was undoubtedly taken by Emerson from the *Bhagavadgītā*). The Russian novelist Leo Tolstoy towards the end of his life published a work, *A Circle of Reading* (*Krug chteniya*), containing thoughts from a wide range of literature which included paraphrases from the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata* as well as from the *Bhagavadgītā*.⁹⁶ The influence of the *Bhagavadgītā* among other Sanskrit texts on the German philosophers Hegel and Schopenhauer is rather better known. Subsequently, it has been an influence on the poetry of T. S. Eliot, particularly in his *Four Quartets*.⁹⁷

⁹⁵ For details see Lidia Sudyka 1995. A more recent article (not consulted) on Polish translations of the *Bhagavadgītā* is Maria Mariola Wüthrich-Sarnowska 1996.

⁹⁶ See S. D. Serebriany 1993: 58–60.

⁹⁷ For some analysis see Siew-Yue Killingley 1990 and several articles in Verma 1990.

A useful overview of its impact in the West was published by Eric Sharpe to mark the bicentenary of Wilkins' translation.⁹⁸ The *Bhagavadgītā* has in fact exercised a far wider appeal worldwide than any other part of either epic and over three hundred translations into English have appeared to date; a study of its translation history by Callewaert and Hemraj notes that it had been translated into seventy-five languages (many of course those of India itself) and that almost two thousand translations had by then appeared.⁹⁹ This appeal for the West was undoubtedly a factor in the rediscovery of the *Bhagavadgītā* in modern Hinduism, as Thomas Hopkins shows in his study of its use by Hindu reformers.¹⁰⁰ It is thus not entirely coincidental that Gandhi became acquainted with the *Bhagavadgītā* during his time in London studying for the Bar.

However, the influence of the *Bhagavadgītā* is not the same thing as the influence of the *Mahābhārata* as a whole, still less of both epics; this has been more restricted, though not to be ignored. Such influence has naturally been primarily literary. One general legacy of the *Mahābhārata* to world literature may be the emboxing technique, which is particularly associated with the *Pañcatantra* and its derivatives, but which may have its origins in the hierarchical frame stories of the *Mahābhārata* (from which, of course, the narrative frames also pass to the *Purāṇas*). In another artistic medium, it is interesting to note that Gustav Holst composed two operas based on the epics, *Sita* and *Savitri*, while the story of Rṣyaśṛṅga has appeared as a Danish opera.¹⁰¹ As Lidia Sudyka has shown, several members of the artistic and literary movement known as 'Young Poland' at the beginning of the 20th century drew inspiration from Indian literature and two in particular were influenced by the *Rāmāyaṇa*, Antoni Lange and Jan Kasprowicz; Lange's interest was prompted by his reading of Leconte de Lisle's *Poèmes Antiques*, while Kasprowicz produced a libretto for a musical drama entitled *Sita, Indyjski hymn miłości* (*Sita, the Indian hymn of love*). These are only a few random examples, but they give an indication of the way in which the Sanskrit epics have begun in a small way to provide themes and plots for Western literature too.

By now it is reasonable to say that there is a fairly wide-spread awareness in the West of the existence and even the basic narratives

⁹⁸ Sharpe 1985.

⁹⁹ Callewaert and Hemraj 1983.

¹⁰⁰ Thomas Hopkins 1988.

¹⁰¹ On the latter see Else Pauly 1987–88.

of the Sanskrit epics. Peter Brook's dramatisation of the *Mahābhārata* was perhaps the most important single factor in this but the TV serialisation of both epics on Doordarshan was also instrumental in it, since the episodes were subsequently bought for screening in other countries. The script for Brook's stage adaptation of the *Mahābhārata* was written by Jean-Claude Carrière and the play was directed by Brook and performed by the International Centre of Theatre Research (Brook's experimental company).¹⁰² It opened in Avignon in 1985 and was staged subsequently, between 1985 and 1988, in French in France, Germany, Greece and Spain, and in English at Zürich, Los Angeles, New York, Perth, Adelaide, Copenhagen, Glasgow and Tokyo; however, it was never staged in India, although Brook and his associates did visit India to watch performances drawn from the epic and to collect props and costume materials. A film version in English, considerably shortened and adapted for the screen, was produced several years later. There was only one Indian in the cast, Mallika Sarabhai, who played the roles of Satyavatī and Draupadī. In many respects, the most significant Indian input came through Jerzy Grotowski, who had studied Chinese opera, Japanese Noh and Indian Kathakali traditions and worked with Brook for a time, especially since one of his protégés, Ryszard Cieslak, played the role of Dhṛtarāṣṭra in both stage and film versions.

The future of epic studies

Having traced the diffusion of the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa* within India, throughout SE Asia and in more modern times to the West, we have in one sense come to an end of their history but in another sense we have returned almost to the starting point of this study, the development of epic studies charted in the second chapter. It seems appropriate, therefore, in this concluding section to make some remarks on possible future directions that research on the epics might or should take.

First, though, an outline and then some comment on current trends is in order. There are three developments which stand out in the last

¹⁰² Studies of this phenomenon are too numerous to list in full but some which deserve mention are: as a record of the production of the television version, Garry O'Connor (1989), and for some analysis, Katharine Free (1996), and Siew-Yue Killingley (1993).

two decades of the 20th century: they are the progress on the Princeton translation of the *Rāmāyana* (the first volume of which was published in 1984), the number of publications which have looked at the *Mahābhārata* from a broadly religious perspective, and the preparation and the release in 1994 of electronic texts of both epics by Muneo Tokunaga. Another trend, but one that is not so directly concerned with the Sanskrit epics, is the renewed interest in the many versions of the *Rāmāyana* at later stages of Indian culture, while another minor trend is the emergence of gender-studies topics within epic studies, though so far only in a few articles on the epic heroines, as far as I am aware. Too isolated to be called a trend is the attempt by one scholar, Dubuisson, to extend Dumézil's theories to the *Rāmāyana*.

The appearance of successive volumes of the Princeton *Rāmāyana* translation may well lead in due course to a similar resurgence of interest to that which has already occurred with regard to the *Mahābhārata*, especially in its religious aspects, although such interest has not yet had time to make itself apparent. There is in any case the continuing examination of the early development of the Rāma cult by Hans Bakker to prove that there is real scholarly interest in Rāma as *avatāra* and cult figure,¹⁰³ as well as the various studies of later versions of the *Rāmāyana* (often including comparison of several). In general, the main trend recently seems to be that most work, at least in the West, has been done by scholars with a religious studies interest rather than those with a primarily Indological concern. However, it is worth stressing from the start how urgent is the need for adequate translations of the texts on the basis of the Critical Editions, since these will open up the epics to more interdisciplinary work by scholars who are not primarily Sanskritists, and indeed may not know the language at all. It is, therefore, very much to be hoped that progress on the *Rāmāyana* will be maintained (and indeed, if possible, accelerated) and that the plans by James Fitzgerald to continue van Buitenen's translation of the *Mahābhārata* will result in its eventual completion. However, the most pressing need of all is for a complete translation of the *Harivamśa*, which has all too often been the poor relation of epic studies.

In the area of gender relations, there were in the past a number of rather superficial articles on the position of women, and more recently from a contemporary perspective Sally Sutherland has made

¹⁰³ Cf. for example Bakker 1989 and 1991.

a comparison between Draupadī and Sītā, emphasising their quite different characters; in another article she has also examined the interaction between Kaikeyī and Mantharā.¹⁰⁴ This topic of gender relations is one which will no doubt be explored extensively over the next few years, although one limitation that will have to be borne in mind is the interests of the authors and audience, which mean that as with aspects relating to social groups the picture given in the epics may well not be realistic. The role of gender in the basic narrative framework of the epics—for example, in its use metaphorically for the relationship between the king and Earth—has not yet been explored at all systematically. Such symbolic aspects may well prove more rewarding to investigate.

Before moving on entirely to the future, it is also worth mentioning the role of conferences in raising awareness. It is natural and proper that there should be panels on the epics and Purāṇas at the regular World Sanskrit Conferences, where every aspect of Sanskrit studies is represented, but it is interesting that a panel on the role of the *Mahābhārata* in South Asia is planned for the 15th European Conference on Modern South Asian Studies (Prague, September 1998). Even more relevant are the specific conferences, of which in many instances the proceedings have been or will be published; for the epics these include not only the many held in India but also, for example, the series of International *Rāmāyaṇa* Conferences (held among other places at Leuven, Turin and Leiden to name the more significant), the Conference on Contemporary *Rāmāyaṇa* Traditions held at St. Augustin in September 1987, a *Rāmāyaṇa* conference at Edinburgh in October 1992, and a conference on the *Bhagavadgītā* at Cambridge in the middle of 1995.¹⁰⁵ More significant still in the longer term should be the Dubrovnik International Conferences on the Sanskrit Epics and Purāṇas, the first of which was held in August 1997, since one of its aims is to encourage more co-ordinated lines of research in the future.

These should certainly include a renewed emphasis on textual

¹⁰⁴ Sutherland 1989 and 1992. Robert P. Goldman also draws on the epics quite extensively in his 1993 article.

¹⁰⁵ For the proceedings so far published of these conferences see Pollet 1995, Thiel-Horstmann 1991 and Lipner 1997. Regrettably, the balance between the academic and the devotional approaches of International *Rāmāyaṇa* Conferences has recently shifted away from the academic, with all controversial views now explicitly discouraged.

analysis and more detailed study of Epic Sanskrit. In this respect, the projected volume by Thomas Oberlies on *Epic Grammar* for the new *Grundriss* is greatly to be welcomed. However, perhaps the biggest stimulus in that direction may be given by the already mentioned electronic texts of both the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata*, which have recently been made available by Muneo Tokunaga. These provide a wealth of new opportunities for the study of the epics, in particular because of the possibilities for carrying out individual word-searches, for analysis of grammatical forms (especially if consistent methods of tagging can be adopted by different scholars) and for metrical analysis. They should, therefore, contribute to a return to the greater emphasis on textual analysis which is clearly desirable. There is, though, a danger—these electronic texts contain just the text of the two Critical Editions without any of the material included in the Critical Apparatus (neither the variant readings nor the * passages and App. I passages); to have produced and made available the entire text of both epics is a major task and achievement by Tokunaga and it is no criticism of that achievement to point out what is not included. There is, however, a risk that this bare text will come to be seen implicitly by less energetic scholars as the only authentic text of the epics rather than as the best approximation attainable by that means to an early form of the epics; if so, this would be an unfortunate and regrettable result of using a tool which potentially has much to offer. Indeed, it is perhaps not too much of a digression to suggest that the use of such electronic media may provide a solution to the current debate about the place of critical editions in the study of the Purāṇas; it should be practicable to enter the text of as many manuscripts as wanted and, by means of various search tools, to view this material on screen in a way that enables each individual scholar to manipulate it as appropriate—either to make an edition or to obtain an overview of the range of manuscript evidence—without being presented first with some other scholar's interpretation as editor. The great achievement of the Critical Editions of the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata* has been that they have made available such a large selection of the manuscript evidence and a focus exclusively on the text presented there would be a backward step. Used rightly, however, such electronic texts hold the potential for major advances in our knowledge and understanding of a wide range of texts but particularly of such voluminous works as the epics. Any steps to input more material (from the * passages and App. I or the variant readings for the text recorded), even if only for

a sample of passages, would act as a valuable corrective to any such tendency to canonise the bare text of the Critical Editions.

Analysis of vocabulary and individual word studies remain a highly desirable aspect of future research and can be facilitated by the use of computers. These studies need to be undertaken not only within each epic but also comparatively over a range of literature; older notions of the static nature of Sanskrit vocabulary are giving way to a more realistic appreciation of the changes over time and in different situations but that needs to be followed through with many more of that type of careful contextual study, based on or including the epic evidence, that Minoru Hara in particular has undertaken.¹⁰⁶ There are signs that the epic vocabulary is not characterised by the extensive synonymy of classical Sanskrit vocabulary, but the extent to which at various stages it is a natural and living form of speech—in this respect as in others—merits further exploration, along with its relationship to other specific forms or dialects of Sanskrit and the possible differences between the two epics.

In addition to more general linguistic analysis of the epics as a whole, there is also a real need for linguistic studies of smaller portions of the *Mahābhārata*, at the level of individual books, of the minor *parvans*, of episodes and possibly of short groups of *adhyāyas*, while further similar work on the *Rāmāyaṇa* would certainly be helpful. Such analysis should facilitate more explicit comparisons between books or these smaller units within each epic, and possibly between the two epics. There is also a pressing need for more linguistic and stylistic analysis of the constituted text of each epic in relation to the * passage and App. I material. These analyses ought to contribute significantly to further investigation of the transition from oral to written transmission—in which a real input from the study of folk narrative in other cultures or other stages of Indian culture could also prove valuable—and from *kṣatriya* to brāhmaṇ milieux, as well as of the possible interrelationship between these. However, as was emphasised in chapter 3, any assessment of the abilities of oral poets must not be too restricted and literary sophistication should not be seen as a mark of written composition. Much more indicative of orality is likely to be the extent to which standard themes are employed in both narrative and description. Here the type of analysis that Vassilkov has initiated should prove productive.

¹⁰⁶ For example, Hara 1986, 1992 and 1994.

All such analyses must also be placed on a sounder statistical basis than has been the case up to now, although it must also be recognised that this will not automatically lead to conclusive or significant results; however, the building up of the total picture is at least as valuable in the longer term as individually more exciting results. The choice of particular features to be examined will inevitably affect the outcome in ways that are difficult, if not impossible, to predict in advance; the recent work by Lars Martin Fosse in applying statistical methods to samples from several Sanskrit texts (including several samples from different parts of both epics) illustrates both the potential and the problems inherent in the method.¹⁰⁷

The use of computers should also prove to be a major aid for metrical analysis. Some initial results achieved by Tokunaga on the basis of his electronic texts were noted already in chapters 3 and 7, but there is much more still to be done. Tokunaga himself observes that the metrical patterns of the major *parvans* of the *Mahābhārata* look fairly uniform, particularly when compared with the *Bhagavadgītā* and the *Nalopākhyāna*, but he also suggests that more contrast may become apparent when the investigation is taken to the level of the minor *parvans* or particular sections; this seems highly plausible but obviously needs to be tested. Even less metrical analysis has been undertaken for the *Rāmāyaṇa* than for the *Mahābhārata* and so the need here is at least as great, quite apart from the interest and possible significance of comparison between the two.

It cannot be stressed too much that, although a strong emphasis is being placed in these remarks on linguistic analysis, it should not be seen as an end in itself but as an aid to a fuller understanding of the epics and specifically as the basis which enables other aspects to be studied adequately. There is not merely room, but also a definite need, for the specific skills of various non-linguistic disciplines to be brought to bear on the epics; for example, the discipline of comparative literature could well be illuminating for an understanding of the literary techniques of the poets who produced them. Again, there needs to be a greater understanding of the relationship of verbal to visual texts, especially in relation to the period before our oldest extant manuscripts. The brief survey of sculptural representations of both epics earlier in this chapter was implicitly a plea for this aspect to be given more weight, as well as a demonstration of the influence of the

¹⁰⁷ Fosse 1997.

epics on Indian culture at large. However, for any real advance to be made beyond the mere cataloguing of examples, there will need to be greater collaboration between textual scholars and art historians.

It needs also to be stressed that, regrettably, little has yet been done to analyse the linguistic features of the *Harivamśa*, which is usually assumed to share the same features as the two major epics. While this is no doubt true in general terms, there are likely to be variations of detail in usage, as well as shifts in vocabulary which could hold clues to our understanding of this text, which holds a key position not only in the relationship between the two epics (where it is held to be a *khila* of the *Mahābhārata* but stylistically seems quite close to the *Rāmāyaṇa*) but also in the relationship of the epics to the Purāṇas. Investigation of the *Harivamśa* is therefore valuable not only in its own right but also for the sake of such broader comparisons. With regard to its main narrative content, the setting of Kṛṣṇa's life among the cowherds clearly does not reflect the standard pattern of Indian society and culture at the period—still to be accurately determined—of its composition, although presumably it is based to some degree on the way of life of such a group. However, the question then becomes one of the extent to which this picture is drawn realistically and how far it is the idyllic fantasy of outsiders (which in this context presumably means that of orthodox brāhmaṇ redactors). As was noted in chapter 5, this has not really been investigated seriously as yet.

This question of how far the picture presented is realistic also enters into any assessment of the details about society, material culture and other realia which can be gained from study of the two main epics. Here there is an urgent need for renewed study of these features of the *Mahābhārata* to update the valuable but now dated work undertaken by E. W. Hopkins, while more can be done on the *Rāmāyaṇa* to complement the studies so far done on the basis of the Critical Edition. An example of the sort of work that still remains to be done at a basic level is provided by the lists of fauna and flora from the *Āranyakaparvan* given in chapter 4, where fuller analysis of this material (and the collection of more from other *parvans*) would almost certainly provide further clues to the origins of the text, as comparable material from the *Rāmāyaṇa* has already begun to do. Equally, the *Śānti* and *Anuśāsana* *parvans* in particular provide an extremely rich source for the history of religious, social and political ideas but it does not do justice to this wealth of material to treat it, as is so often done, as belonging to a single undefined period, a timeless past. Only when

the process by which this material was brought together—the reasons for its assembling and the periods and contexts in which it was done—is better understood will it yield the results that it is capable of providing. Until then, the apparent inconsistency and even contradictions of adjacent passages, juxtaposed in this process of growth, will continue to present an obstacle to serious scholars and an opportunity for obscurantists.

The one such area where a significant amount is being published, that of the religious aspects of the two epics, shows both the possibilities of such more detailed analysis and, at times, the dangers of ignoring the careful textual analysis being argued for here. The emphasis on the religious aspects is welcome but it should not crowd out the other aspects which must equally be investigated if a rounded view of the epics is to be achieved. One thing, however, that several recent publications in this area have shown to a certain extent is the potential of a co-ordinated approach to a particular text. This is where in particular the future lies—in greater collaboration between scholars, especially if by that means different approaches can be combined in order to provide greater illumination. The epics themselves are the products of many minds and will yield their riches to those who approach them together.

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Abbreviations

<i>ABORI</i>	<i>Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute</i>
<i>ALB</i>	<i>Adyar Library Bulletin</i>
<i>BDCRI</i>	<i>Bulletin of the Deccan College Research Institute</i>
<i>BEFEO</i>	<i>Bulletin de l'École Française d'Extrême Orient</i>
<i>BORI</i>	Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute
<i>DOT</i>	Deutsche Orientalistentag
<i>HR</i>	<i>History of Religions</i>
<i>IA</i>	<i>Indian Antiquary</i>
<i>IHQ</i>	<i>Indian Historical Quarterly</i>
<i>IIJ</i>	<i>Indo-Iranian Journal</i>
<i>IT</i>	<i>Indologica Taurinensis</i>
<i>JAAR</i>	<i>Journal of the American Academy of Religion</i>
<i>JAOS</i>	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
<i>JIH</i>	<i>Journal of Indian History</i>
<i>J. Ind. Phil.</i>	<i>Journal of Indian Philosophy</i>
<i>JOIB</i>	<i>Journal of the Oriental Institute, Baroda</i>
<i>JORM</i>	<i>Journal of Oriental Research, Madras</i>
<i>JRAS</i>	<i>Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society</i>
<i>JSAL</i>	<i>Journal of South Asian Literature</i>
<i>NIA</i>	<i>New Indian Antiquary</i>
<i>OLZ</i>	<i>Orientalistische Literaturzeitung</i>
<i>WZKM</i>	<i>Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes</i>
<i>WZKS(O)</i>	<i>Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Süd- (und Ost-) Asiens</i>
<i>ZDMG</i>	<i>Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft</i>

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